THE NATAL CAMPAIGN

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BENNET BURLEIGH.

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1900

BY

BENNET BURLEIGH

AUTHOR OF

"SIRDAR AND KHALIFA," "KHARTOUM CAMPAIGN"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

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INTRODUCTION

THE following chapters sent home by Mr. Bennet Burleigh, the Special War Correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, are published with only the smallest possible change from the form in which they appeared in the daily newspaper. Soon after the failure of General Buller at Vaal Krantz, Mr. Burleigh left the seat of war in Northern Natal, and transferred himself to the western sphere of campaign with Lord Roberts. A very short epilogue, not from his pen, narrates the conclusion of the Natal Campaign. In an appendix will be found an account written by Mr. McHugh, a correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* who was imprisoned in Ladysmith, of the great attack made by the Boers on January 6th, which was so valiantly repulsed by General White's garrison.

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THE NATAL CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER I

THROUGH THE REPUBLICS—GENERAL JOUBERT'S VIEWS

Ladysmith, October 6, 1899

In the train which carried me through from Cape Town, *viâ* the Orange Free State, to the Transvaal were many returning burghers, old and young. There were many lads fresh from schools and colleges in the Cape Colony, ordered home to bear arms in the war. They were noisy and boastful, as those who put their armour on in callow days often are. But to that they were urged, openly and secretly, by Colonial Dutchmen, and later on by their own people. It is not pleasant to reflect that, for years past, a stream of mawkish sentiment has been allowed to flow unchecked—nay, often has been encouraged—that a Dutch South Afrikander nation were the heirs of the whole country, from the Cape to the Zambesi, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. Yet I could not help but note that they

were apprehensive of the prowess of the British gunners and the risks to be run from being under the fire of our lyddite. It is only the ignorant burghers of the remote districts who sniff in scorn at the idea of England attempting to oppose their arms. Your "dopper" hoodwinks himself that he is invincible because of his powers of marksmanship, and the special aid on his behalf of Providence. Said one of this fanatical type the other day to a Britisher, "I suppose the English can send an army of 20,000 soldiers against us?" "Oh yes; 500,000 troops, if necessary," answered the patriot. "Verdompt!" rejoined the Boer, in unconscious humour, "it would take us three months to kill them all."

At Pretoria I called on President Kruger, but the hour was unpropitious, for the Head of the State was busy. However he sent me a message, and I left the quaint official bungalow, its armed constabulary, and rude, sculptured marble lions, to return on some other occasion. Like the late Prime Minister of the Malagasy, Rainiliarivony, Kruger, though an old man, tries to do too much. Nothing is too big or too small for him to pass over. Everything has to be submitted for his approval, nominal or otherwise. I have been told that he has aged rapidly, and that his memory often fails him.

With or without preliminary Boer successes, I cannot credit that any large number of Cape Colonists will raise the standard of revolt.

Undoubtedly the South Afrikander Bond has, intentionally or not, openly or covertly, been neither more nor less than a gigantic conspiracy against British rule, British speech, and equality of rights. But the plotters lack the courage to give forcible effect to their sectional prejudices; consequently, there will be no general insurrection attempted in the Colony. The more enthusiastic Afrikanders have trekked across the border or gone by train to join the Transvaal and Orange Free State burghers. Of these truculent fellows some already regret their precipitancy. A month in the field will cure many more of their political fever, and make them anxious to go home. No serious apprehension need be felt about the maintenance of order in Cape Colony. The length of the single line, and the roughness of the border country near the Orange Free State, make it quite out of the question for any General to seek to reach Pretoria by that route. At a score or more of places the railway could be cut by Boer raiders, the traffic stopped, supplies cut off, and the safety of the troops imperilled. Operations, therefore, along the eastern border are only likely to be conducted by a limited force of Regulars co-operating with bodies of Colonial or other Volunteers. As you enter the Orange Free State the railway winds about up and down steep grades and around very sharp curves. They say, by way of illustration, that the guard often gets a light for his pipe from the engine-driver as the train rounds corners!

Truly, the war is not over-liked among the Orange Free Staters. Not a few proclaim that President Steyn has permitted himself to be tricked, and has imperilled the existence of the Republic by truckling to Kruger and the Bond. Numbers have stolen, and still are stealing, away on various pretexts out of the country, whilst several have been bold enough to denounce the attitude of their leaders. Once well over the border the country is relatively flat, and is quite open right up to Johannesburg. It is a lofty tableland, over 4000 feet above the sea, upon which miniature hills have apparently been dumped, as cinder-heaps or *débris* from mines in the fields of the Black Country. A wheeled vehicle, even a tricycle, might be trundled anywhere over the veldt. From a military standpoint, except for the enormous distance from a base, it would be an ideal road for an army to march by. Very much behind in their war equipment were the Free Staters, as I found, compared to their brethren of the Transvaal. Still, there were signs of preparation. Provisions were being stored, and armed levies were assembling, but many of the railway bridges were even then left unguarded. There are few outward signs of racial dislike to the British among the Free Staters, and people who spoke English were not ordinarily looked upon with suspicion or treated with scant civility. There were no fortifications at Bloemfontein—the capital—or anywhere else *en route* that

would have given any trouble to a British force. In short, the country, once the troops secured a foothold upon its spacious plains, would be easily and quickly overrun.

Across the Transvaal border everything was different. It was a foreign country, and very much so to British. There was a rigid and searching Customs scrutiny. Dutch was spoken as a matter of duty, and nobody stopped to hold converse in the English language. At every station there were jostling throngs of excited burghers and bevies of women and girls. The men were swaddled in bandoliers and stocked cartridge belts, and all had rifles, chiefly Mausers, in their hands. From the carriage windows others could be seen riding in twos and threes about the country. There were miles of waggons and trucks blocking the sidings at the principal towns and junctions, showing that food, forage, and transport were being hurriedly hauled to some approved destination. The majority of the population seemed to have rushed in their everyday clothes to take up arms. But there was a considerable minority clad in garb which somewhat resembled military uniforms of the Colonial style, mingled with ancient swashbuckler "get-ups," boots, hats, and buff jerkins. For the uniformed khaki, blue, and grey were the prevailing colours. The wide-awakes were looped up, and around them were blue and white spotted puggarees. I fear that many of the more swagger Boers will

be liable to be mistaken for some of our Colonial brother-soldiers.

It was evident to the most casual observer that commandeering was going forward right and left. An armed Boer in want of anything—saddlery, horse, clothes, provisions, medicines, strong drinks—either with or without authority speedily supplied himself from public or private stores, places of business, or dwellings. Whilst in Pretoria, as well as *en route* thither, I saw doors being burst open, and the contents of premises rifled again and again. The places so attacked were not always unoccupied, but they were generally the property of foreigners. Some of our countrymen protested; others, with professed willingness, gave the Boers what they sought, and obtained certificates for the things. Far too frequently goods were handed to the burghers, and the expectation of their owners is that, whether the Boers win or lose in the war, they will recover the value of their property from one or other side. Surely giving voluntary aid and comfort to an enemy ought not to entitle the parties to indemnification! Compensation claims later on should be closely sifted.

Pretoria is not iron-bound by a chain of forts like Metz. To-day the defences of the town are contemptible. They could withstand no siege, and might even be rushed at a very preliminary stage of an investment. The town lies in a wide hollow, surrounded by swelling hills by no means difficult

of ascent, and with humped sides. But these hills are mostly commanded by others farther afield, and there is the north-eastern side of the town practically without defences. Of the five forts, three are small redoubts, with fronts of less than fifty yards. Two are much larger, enclosing, perhaps, two acres a-piece. Yet these guns are masked by neighbouring lumpy ground, and they have no all-round range of fire. The works, however, are well provided with big cannon and machine guns. Nobody who knows the burgher believes the Boer tactics would induce them to stay to defend their forts. Certainly the Transvaal Government were putting forth prodigious efforts for them to move troops to the Natal border. Their wide system of espionage had convinced them that there was little risk of danger from either the Rhodesian or Delagoa Bay side of the country. Commandoes, which had been hastily despatched to guard these districts, were peremptorily recalled, and hurried away by train towards Natal, to Volksrust, and Utrecht. All traffic, except for their armed burghers, was stopped on the railways. In one day thirty-six trains were sent, *viâ* Elandsfontein (junction near Johannesburg), towards Natal. The country was consumed with the turmoil of coming war. Armed bands were riding hither and thither in all directions. Burghers were eagerly rushing, and others in laggard spirit thrust on to battle. Crowds of excited fugitives, chiefly foreigners—men, women, and children—besieged the railway

stations, striving to find places in carriages or open trucks to convey them anywhere out of the country. Bands of Kaffirs, secretly summoned back to their kraals, had forsaken their work and employers, and at swinging gait, singing as they went, were off to join their people.

Through the personal kindness of the Boer authorities, directed by the interposition of another than myself, I secured free passes and a place on a commando train from Pretoria. It was one of three trains containing the Middleburg contingent among others. A single engine was set, like so many more, to draw from thirty to thirty-five coaches, carrying by actual count over 300 men, their horses, with a small amount of fodder, reserve ammunition, and stores. In a rough way open trucks had been boarded up for the men's mounts, for every Boer rides to battle. Into a truck, the size of an ordinary coal-waggon, were jammed eight or ten of their sturdy little nags. The men also huddled into trucks, squatting about anyhow. I found a corner in the cabin seat of the guard's brake. The journey of twenty hours occupied nearer sixty, so blocked were the lines. There were frequent accidents, especially after dark, to the trains. Only in a single instance, so far, have they had fatal result to human life; but horses have been killed, engines and waggons smashed, in the rush to the border. In my own experience our engine ran full tilt into another,

and the cabin carried away an engine supply standard, whilst men ran some trucks off the line.

The Middleburg contingent were an excellent yeomen type of burghers, the best among the Boers—simple, good-hearted fellows, with a foolish belief that England was a wretched and cowardly country they could put down any day. They were going to invade Natal, eat fish in Durban, and then, if the English did not submit to be thrashed, sail over to London and finish the job! It was sorrowful to think that so few of them realized what they were undertaking. Fine as the Middleburg men looked, they could be outclassed any day by drafts of English, Irish, or Scotch Yeomen. If the latter do not shoot as well, and better, that is because the trouble has not been taken to secure that result. The Middleburg burghers had a Transvaal flag, red, white, and blue, a tricolour with a green band depending. But every field-cornet command sports such a flag, and these were always energetically waved and kept displayed from the carriages. On the way the men occasionally indulged in monotonous psalm-singing tunes, very different from the vivacious catches of Mr. Thomas Atkins when he takes the road to war.

General Joubert, who left Pretoria fifteen hours later than I did, overtook us in his special near Standerton. There, owing to an alarm that the English had been found planting dynamite to blow up the bridges, trains were not allowed to proceed

farther that night. I had a chat with the General, and although helped by others, could not prevail upon him to assure us of a lift in the morning. For the night, in the threatened thunderstorm, I had to shift as best I could with my baggage. There have been of late exceedingly heavy downpours, and I feared another. Putting my belongings in the station-room, and eschewing the various neighbouring Boer encampments, guided by a Kaffir, I went into the town, and ultimately secured a bed of a kind.

At daybreak next morning I got back to the station just as General Joubert's train was steaming away to Sandsspruit. By dint of audacity the station-master was persuaded to stop it, and I boarded the General's own special saloon carriage. Evidently the sheer impudence of the thing must have staggered him, for he forgave me, and came into the compartment, and we chatted for hours on the journey to the big Boer camps at Sands River or Spruit. I noted that the General was generally popular, the Boers clustering about at the stations to shake hands with him. He would descend when the train stopped long enough, and say a few words by way of encouragement. There was once or more some feeble attempts at cheering, but your Transvaal burgher has no lungs for that form of popular approval. Sandsspruit had all the outward semblance of a vast camp in time of war—tents, munitions, cannon, earthworks, and bodies of armed men.

I asked and received permission to snap-shot General Joubert and his more immediate friends. He stepped out of the train and took up a position for that purpose. In appearance he bears strong traces of his French origin. His quick, dark eyes beam with shrewdness and kindness. He has a belief that the future and the present are for the Boer, and declares he would cut his throat sooner than give way on one point of the Transvaal's claims, or doubt God's personal support of their cause. His further political views and plan of campaign must wait description till a later occasion. When we reached Sandsspruit he had so warmed in courtesy that he ran down in a small special train to Volksrust, the Transvaal border-town, and there secured me a truck which conveyed me a little later down the pass to Charleston, the border station in Natal. Nearly everybody had left the place save a Scotch station-master and a few clerks, mostly Scots too. I was welcomed as an escaped prisoner among friends, and treated by a Campbell with Hielan' hospitality. For two days and more I had been cribbed, cabined, and confined, dirty and blood-bespattered. That same evening, however, another special train, by the grace of the Natal railway authorities, took me away down through Laing's Nek, past Majuba, and into the relative comfort and security of Newcastle.

CHAPTER II

REMINISCENCES OF DUNDEE

Ladysmith, October, 1899

War marches with uncertain strides. But a week or so ago very few people in England believed that a serious conflict between Briton and Boer was impending. The general opinion was, even in military circles, that the nominal issues under discussion would not require the arbitrament of the sword. England had been led to the parting of the ways by the moving spirits in the Great Conspiracy against British rule in South Africa. The choice had to be made of abdication of her position as the Paramount Power in the country, or the gage of war, for which her enemies had long made secret and abundant preparation. It has become a habit, if not a maxim, of political parties at home, never to do anything until they are compelled to, more particularly not to vote a farthing of money in the nature of security against war risks. And, in this instance, as has happened before, even leisurely diplomacy outpaced military preparedness. With suddenness

Photo by] VAN REENEN'S PASS IN THE DRAKENSBERG MOUNTAINS, WHERE THE ORANGE FREE STATE BURGHERS ARE NOW PATROLLING. [*A. W. Frodsham.*

the Boer executive launched their ultimatum, and, long before the time-limit named had expired, actual hostilities had been sprung upon the country. Seizure of strategic positions, and the capture of the Harrismith train on October 10, are among instances. Since that date many things have happened, and the initial advantages, which it was feared by all who knew the real state of affairs would belong to the Boers, have become apparent to everybody. Had the necessary fiats gone forth in the beginning for the instant strengthening, by Imperial troops, of the South African garrison, say, by one or two army corps, the public exchequer would have benefited in the immediate future. In war delays are costly, as well as dangerous, expedients.

From north, west, and east the Boers advanced into Natal. Orange Free State commandoes rode in from the Drakenberg Passes near Harrismith, down Van Reenen's and Tintwa; Joubert's motley forces, from Volksrust, by Laing's Nek and the Ingogo; whilst Lucas Meyer's men crossed the Buffalo from Utrecht and Vryheid. The invasion of Natal was begun, the capture of the northern corner of this colony, its coalfields, towns, and connecting railway branches being their immediate objective. They professed to have come to stay, and proceeded to live upon the country. What they needed they took from the people—sometimes on paper promise to pay; more often without. Wide distinctions were made between loyal British

colonists and Boer sympathizers. The property of the latter has almost invariably been left intact, but everything they cared to lay their hands upon, whether in store, dwelling, or field, has been forcibly rifled from the former. It is hard to fully convey to the mind of peaceful-living folk in England how a colonist feels who has had his homestead wrecked, his cattle lifted and killed, when he finds himself stripped penniless of the fruits of forty years' unremitting toil. And your Natal colonist, conscious that Fate had some such cruel chance in store for him, because of the desperate unpreparedness of the country, yet preferred the hazard of war to the continuance of peace that was no peace in South Africa. In darkness or disaster, he wants no truce, but trusts that England will sternly see the thing through. Strange that those who know the Boers longest and best should like them least!

The broken, hilly nature of the northern part of Natal, hemmed in as it is upon either side by the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, puts it very much at the mercy of a big mobile force, such as that of the Boer commandoes. A military leader with dash could have done far more mischief than the enemy have yet succeeded in inflicting upon this practically defenceless region. There is reason, therefore, to be thankful that matters are no worse. On the other hand, given an alert, daring General, a moderately strong body of troops, and freedom

of action, the Boers might have been made to suffer far more, and been hammered in detail. Having put our hands to the plough, there should be no turning back. The war must be pushed through to a successful issue, and one of the means to that end should be to borrow a leaf out of the American General Ulysses Grant's plan of campaign—have no exchanging of prisoners. Nobody was more abused than he for dispensing with all exchange cartels, forcing either side to maintain tens of thousands of prisoners of war. It was a terrible hardship to the captives and their friends, but it was a very effective means of hastening the overthrow of the Confederacy, for the available manhood strength to draw upon in the Southern States was limited, whilst in the North they had but to call for men to get them.

To save the coalfields of Natal and the important town of Dundee it was decided to send a small column there. The district is relatively populous and rich, and is the centre of the largest and best steam and household coalfields. So utterly unprepared for war were the authorities that at no time have the Government railways ever had by them more than a fortnight's reserve of fuel. The fact has been denied by the military, but is incontrovertible all the same. With the shutting down of the pits, the last of which are only as far south as Eland's Laagte, near Ladysmith, resort must be had to imported fuel. Apart from any other question,

there was a strategical gain in holding a position in the Glencoe district, which is close to Dundee. It blocked the routes from the north and east of the Transvaal Boers, from Newcastle and the Utrecht Bridge over the Buffalo River. True, Sir George White, or part of his Staff, hesitated about dividing the British force, leaving part in Ladysmith camp and forming a new post near Dundee. To General Sir Penn Symons was assigned the task and post of honour. With four splendid battalions of infantry, three batteries of artillery, the 18th Hussars, and various bodies of Volunteers and Natal Police, a position was chosen about one and a half mile west of Dundee, on the north side of the Glencoe branch line. There supplies and munitions of all kinds necessary for the force, sufficient for two months, were quickly conveyed by rail. Unfortunately, the lofty Impati Mountain stood but 4000 yards off, upon the north of the railroad and camp. Outposts visited the summit, but it was not attempted to erect any defensive works there or elsewhere. The defects of Dundee camp are exaggerated in the old camp at Ladysmith, which is the most indefensible position for a military camp I have ever seen. But we are told the ground at Ladysmith was chosen and bought years ago for its convenience to water and town, and not for strategical value. It has none.

Within forty-eight hours after the expiry of

their war ultimatum the Boers had invaded Natal upon three sides. They crept up to the Natal Police patrols, an excellent body of mounted men, and succeeded in taking the stations, and in some instances capturing the troopers. For some obscure reason the orders given the police were to retire, and not fire unless fired upon by the enemy. By October 13, advanced parties of the Boers were before Newcastle, and within a few miles of Dundee, and not far to the west of Ladysmith. Indeed, on that day Sir George White led a column of all arms seven miles out from Ladysmith camp towards Besters Station, to engage them, as it was given out that they were coming on in force. After hanging about upon the hills all day the troops were marched back to quarters the same evening. Yet we had gone prepared to bivouac. On the same date the advance of Lucas Meyer's Utrecht-Vryheid commando caught five Natal Police at De Jager's Drift, which the enemy crossed *en route* for Dundee. Joubert's column from the north took the undefended and deserted town of Newcastle on the 14th, Policeman Poole riding over to Dundee to warn General Symons and the garrison of their advent. The Boers found a score or so of white residents in Newcastle, whom they treated fairly well, with the exception of Chief of Police Macdonald. Most of the inhabitants, as I have indicated, had fled south on their approach, including the mayor, a canny Scot, who, when banteringly

advised to remain and deliver up the keys of office to the Boers, cried: "Me stay; let them catch me if they can! They'll no see my feet for stoor"—*i.e.* dust. He got away.

I went upon the armoured train on Sunday, October 15, paying a flying visit to Dundee. The countryside thereabout is as green and charming as any in Natal, and the farmers are well-to-do. Coal-getting, though done upon a large scale, is also dug over a wide area, and consequently the face of Nature has not been defaced and smudged as in the "Black Country." From what had occurred previously, and has since transpired, evidently the Boers' plan of operations is prompted by some person or persons possessed of tactical skill. They have cleverly screened their front, and their separate columns have contrived to synchronize their concerted movements. On Tuesday, October 17, Joubert's forces were crossing the Ingagane; Meyer, with 5000 men, was advancing towards Dundee, extending his left towards Helpmaakar, menacing Greytown, and the Free State Boers were actively hostile around Acton Homes and Besters, both west of Ladysmith. Precautions were taken in Dundee to send off women and children and the property of the banks. Next day, October 18, Boer scouts had been seen close to Dundee, and as far down the railway as Eland's Laagte. The armoured trains, of which there are three, with carriages loopholed for musketry, but with no

provision for cannon or Maxims, were put in commission. But the severe gradients, curves, and cuttings are against these being of any real help in Natal, and they have been of little service in the campaign so far.

By October 19 the enemy had completed his preparations for delivering his attack upon Dundee and its subsequent attempted investment. A small body from Joubert's force captured the passenger train at Eland's Laagte Station, about eighteen miles north of Ladysmith, severing General Sir George White's communications with General Penn Symons' column at Dundee. One of the *Daily Telegraph's* correspondents managed to get through to Glencoe upon the earlier train, which was fired upon by the enemy; but the handful of Boers were driven off by the use of a revolver and rifle, backed by the pluck of the engineer, who put on all steam. Strangely enough, whilst the Boers severed direct telegraphic and rail communication at Eland's Laagte betwixt Ladysmith and Dundee camps, they overlooked the telegraph wire by way of Helpmaakar, Greytown to Maritzburg, from Glencoe and Dundee. Without fighting an action General White could not restore touch with General Symons. On Friday, October 20, a reconnoitring mounted force proceeded from Ladysmith towards Eland's Laagte. The history of that enterprise may be told at once. Our cavalry, regulars, and volunteers pressed on beyond Modder's Spruit and

to Eland's Laagte, finding at first but few Boers at the latter place. But the enemy were soon reinforced, and our troopers retired towards dusk to Ladysmith. Meanwhile the battle of Dundee was in progress.

It was with scant warning the attack upon Dundee commenced. General Symons reposed, and deservedly, the highest confidence in his troops, keeping his men in a practically open camp. Outposts were placed some distance off upon the lesser surrounding hills. Meyer made his first essay from the west side of Dundee, by way of Mount Talana, or Smith's Hill, a bold ridge rising over 700 feet from the back of the town. At 2 a.m. of Friday, October 20, one of the picquets of the Dublin Fusiliers were fired on by Boer scouts. They returned the fusillade and maintained their ground. Towards dawn, or near 5 a.m., the camp and town were startled by the discharge of Boer cannon placed upon Smith's Hill, which is scarcely a mile and a half east of Dundee. Their shells came hurtling over the town and dropping into camp. Very few of the missiles burst, and, as the aim besides was bad, they inflicted little hurt. According to rule, the troops had been standing to arms awaiting daybreak. Without a moment's hesitation General Symons ordered the Hussars, mounted infantry detachments, two field batteries, and three infantry battalions forward to carry the Boer position. The Leicesters and one

battery were left behind as a camp guard, whilst the 1st Battalion King's Rifles (1st B.K.R.R.C.), the Dublin and Royal Irish Fusiliers advanced to dislodge the enemy.

Moving to the north of the town, the 13th and 69th Field Batteries speedily got to work, tearing the enemy with shrapnel. The Boers fought their guns at first for all they were worth; but the British shells taking heavy toll in killed and wounded, by 7.30 a.m. the enemy's batteries were silenced. Meanwhile the infantry had advanced unseen along a donga on the north, and emerged within range of Talana—the Rifles on the right, the Dublins upon the left, whilst the Royal Irish Fusiliers were in support. A battery galloped forward, passing through the town, and took new ground to the right, where, at 3000 yards range, they made the slopes and top of Smith's Kopje perilously uncomfortable. A squadron of the 18th Hussars and some mounted infantry went to the left to harass the enemy's reserves. Going forward in open skirmish order the Rifles and Fusiliers proceeded right across Smith's Farm towards Talana. From the hilltop and its sides, from every coign of cover, the Boers used their Mausers, firing rapidly and continuously. Their nearest marksmen were still 1500 yards away. In front of the troops was an open strip of flat land about 500 yards broad, and void of cover. Barbed-wire fencing girt the meadow. With little bidding,

the soldiers made a rush across the open and gained the edge of a 200-yard-wide belt of scrub wood running along the side of the hill. The Boers used their magazine rifles, firing rapidly as our men doubled forward, inflicting a good many casualties. Bravely the Indian hospital contingent, with native dhoolie bearers, followed to pick up the wounded.

The Boer rifle fire never slackened, but their guns and supports upon the hilltop were receiving constant chastisement from our batteries. Colonel Dartnell, chief of the Natal police, a veteran soldier, was present, and, knowing the district, was able to give invaluable assistance to the troops. General Penn Symons, with his wonted gallantry, continually exposed himself, hastening the delivery of the assault. He was begged by friends more than once to keep in the background, for plainly Boer sharpshooters were marking him down. With his staff, he rode forward across the open strip, getting into the wood cover untouched. But the Boers, reinforced and more determined, strove to drive the soldiers backward. Fire as they would, Tommy Atkins never budged, returning shot for shot with interest; but the casualties on both sides were swelling rapidly. The Rifles brought their Maxim into play, relieving some little of the pressure. At 8 a.m. our batteries took up a position within 1200 yards of the foe, shaking them with salvoes of shrapnel. Soon afterwards, whilst standing in an exposed glade of the wood, hurrying his men onward,

General Symons was shot in the stomach. He made little of the wound for a while, telling officers and men to push ahead. Colonel Dartnell stood by him, assisting him to sit his horse, which he led off under a galling fire. But the shower of bullets that laid the General low also made havoc amongst his staff, only three officers escaping uninjured. Later on, Colonel Dartnell brought Major Hammersley, who was severely wounded, out of the ring of fire.

Undeterred, the Rifles and Fusiliers once more hastened forward and began to climb the steep sides of Talana, under a murderous fusillade of the Boers. Progress was slow, but doggedly the infantry pressed on. By 10 a.m. advanced parties, by rushes from cover to cover, finally gained the shelter of a low stone wall, 500 feet below the crest-line. The troops were spread far apart, but intuitively knot after knot reinforced the daring men holding the wall. Thereafter the Boers were met on more advantageous terms, and they soon began to suffer. The firing became desultory, the Tommies waiting to see a head to hit it. Gradually Rifles and Fusiliers mingled, and at a quarter-past high noon had crept up to within a few yards of the crest. Until 1.30 p.m. they lay there, their number all the while being added to, and the batteries, from a fresh position, bursting shrapnel all over the summit of Talana. Then the "Charge" sounded, and a miscellaneous body, chiefly of Rifles,

with Fusiliers, stormed the last thirty yards, to find on gaining the top that the Boers were well started in full retreat on the run. A few were shot down, but the majority had decamped, taking their guns. Their dead and wounded, rifles, ammunition, saddlery stores, etc., lay about in endless confusion. So ended the more stirring part of the battle and storming of Dundee Hill. The enemy, following their wonted custom, had removed the most of their dead and wounded. Two miles to the eastward, looking from Talana, could be seen the principal hospital of the routed Boers. A few prisoners were taken, two of whom were Cape Colony Boers, and a third was from Natal. Our casualties were about forty-five killed and a hundred and eighty wounded. Beyond doubt the enemy suffered far more severely. It had rained heavily the night before, but the weather cleared on the morning of the battle. Dundee was jubilant, and the townsfolk lined the streets and cheered the returning victorious troops on their way to camp.

But for an untoward incident, which there seems every reason to credit, the army of Lucas Meyer might have been put out of future reckoning in the war. When the hill was stormed, the Boers there displayed a white flag, and that the men took as indicating complete surrender. Later on, the flying Boers descending the hillside also waved a white flag. They, however, did not halt, but streamed off to the rear, passing unmolested under the

noses, so to speak, of a battery; it was but 500 yards away, and beyond the cavalry escort. Both had orders not to attack, as it was believed the Boers had made up their minds to yield themselves prisoners. Later on, it was made clear they had intended nothing of the kind. A few of the Hussars and the Mounted Infantry in another part of the field succeeded in getting at the fugitives and inflicting loss; but Colonel Mollet, with several other officers, and about eighty men of the 18th Hussars and Mounted Infantry, riding out too far, lost his way and got cut off and captured, much to the chagrin of the rest of the column. It has since been learned they are prisoners in Pretoria. The Boers, however, soon rallied. They had an armistice on Saturday to bring in the wounded and bury the dead. Reinforcements arrived, possibly including commandoes from Joubert's column. They changed their position, and, although still near Smith's Hill, sent a large force to occupy the big, lofty Impati mountain, 4000 yards north of the camp. From there they reopened with cannon, this time a 40-pounder—a "Long Tom"—upon town and camp. The place became untenable, and Colonel Yule, who succeeded General Symons in command, moved the force to the south side of the railway, going into quarters near the collieries. The more seriously wounded, including the General, were placed in the Dundee public buildings, from which the Red Cross flag was displayed. There was an attempt made

to remove the two months' supplies to the new camp, but the enemy's fire rendered it impracticable. On Sunday the troops strove to save the situation, but a report got abroad—unfounded, I am told—that the column was short of ammunition, having no more than would suffice to fight another such battle. Thereupon the resolve was taken to evacuate the place and march by the heavy roundabout Helpmaakar road and Washbank Valley back to Ladysmith, to rejoin General White's immediate command. All the sick and wounded it was determined to leave behind, in charge of the Army doctors, who volunteered to remain and do their duty.

Silently at dusk, on Sunday, October 22, Yule's column returned to their old camp, recovered some more ammunition, and took three or four days' emergency rations. Thereafter, in the dark and the rain, the force retraced their steps, and, passing south amid the wild, rocky hills, started for Ladysmith. Stores, tents, and all baggage, except what officers and men stood up in, were left behind. By daybreak on Monday morning the column was nine miles away. That they had gone was unknown to most of the townsfolk left in Dundee. When they awoke to the fact, the majority hurried south on their account. The Boers, puzzled at the situation, did not descend into Dundee until nearly eleven a.m., and then they found so much to take in eatables and drinkables and general loot that they were in no haste to follow Yule's force. In terribly wet

weather, over bemired tracks and rough boulders, through narrow, mountainous passes, General Yule's men toiled, marching usually all night long. Had the enemy waylaid them upon the way a calamity must have ensued, for in one part of the Washbank Gorge the pass was but little over 100 yards wide, and the rocks rose almost perpendicularly upon either side for three miles. We at Ladysmith knew something of their coming *viâ* the Greytown-Maritzburg telegraph. To the intense relief of all in Ladysmith, Colonel Dartnell rode into that place on Tuesday, October 24, arriving at 1 p.m. with the news that he had left Yule's column twenty miles out, all well, though wet and weary. The same day he returned to them, escorting a supply and relief force. Next day many of the men arrived, and upon Thursday, the 26th, we welcomed them all safely in.

CHAPTER III

THE TRUTH ABOUT ELAND'S LAAGTE

Ladysmith, October 25, 1899.

Whilst hard knocks were being given and received both by Briton and Boer at Dundee, those with General Sir George White's main column at Ladysmith were not altogether idle. Detachments of cavalry, gallant Natalian Volunteers, Border Mounted Rifles, Carbineers, Imperial Light Horse, and others, together with squadrons of 5th Lancers and 5th Dragoon Guards, as well as a few Hussars, were daily made to cast wide afield to ascertain the enemy's whereabouts. Here and there they had little skirmishes with Boer patrols, in which the best of the fight was rarely with the enemy. Ladysmith was a big camp, and the town of one or two streets was filled by day and night with nondescript visitors who came and went at their own sweet will, and of whom many were actively in sympathy with the enemy. Their intelligence department certainly never had much need to stand in want of full information upon any subject connected with the British

arms. But there, as some official said, "England is a great and powerful nation, and can afford to overlook many of the questionable doings of Boers or their spies." Perhaps; but not even military chiefs have the right lightly to contribute to the making of widows and orphans, be they those even of the humblest Tommy. I said from the first, Ladysmith camp was an untenable position. Placed, like the town itself, in low ground, it is begirt by rough, rocky hills, every one of which is overlooked and commanded by ridges and mountains dotted around all the points of the compass, except a narrow strip of level upon the south side. In successive rude Titanic steps the Drakensberg and Biggarsberg ranges descend into this region of Natal.

When it was made clear that the Boers were really bent upon invasion in force, and large bodies of them were almost within striking distance, the military stores depôt was moved from the old camp to ground around the railway goods sheds. Perhaps it would be more correct to write that room was found there for the newer and larger consignments of munitions of war, including rations and forage, and the supplies sent to the old camp were retransported back to town. In fact, quite recently the camp itself was hastily evacuated, many tents being left standing, and much personal baggage was allowed to lie about all night quite unguarded, at the mercy of pilfering Kaffirs or marauders. The troops

were moved into town, and small camps were formed upon the east and south sides of Ladysmith. Next day most of the tents and baggage were brought in, but why the camp was so hastily evacuated I have never been able to learn authoritatively. It was subsequently re-occupied. Major-General French, attended by Major Haig, arrived in Ladysmith on or about October 19. Next day he proceeded on a reconnaissance with part of his cavalry command and a battery of field artillery up the Newcastle Road towards Eland's Laagte. There was a little skirmishing at various points, particularly just beyond Modder's Spruit, where the Boers were caught and smartly shelled and driven back beyond Eland's Laagte. Four of their scouts were caught by our troopers. I rode with the latter, who dismounted, and were engaged more than once with their carbines while the Mounted Volunteers used their rifles. We had a few casualties, and the Boers surely lost a good many more than our men. It was ascertained that bodies of the enemy were moving south and eastward. Towards nightfall the Boers were reinforced by several commandoes bearing Transvaal flags, and our cavalry slowly returned to town.

Early on Saturday, October 21, before daybreak, General French led out towards Eland's Laagte squadrons of the 5th Dragoon Guards, 5th Lancers, one Field Battery (15lb.), the Natal Mountain Battery, various detachments of Mounted Volunteers,

including the Imperial Light Horse under Colonel Chisholm and Major Sampson, and half of the Manchester Regiment. The infantry were moved out by rail, most of them riding in the armoured train, of which the iron sides of the loopholed trucks and engine are painted khaki. For causes easy to understand, when the nature of the country is considered, our armoured trains have to move forward very gingerly. Still, each one of the three here has been under rifle-fire, and the men manning them have given a warm reception to the Boers. The latter, however, are difficult to coax to close quarters. Tommy is fond of an occasional trip in the armoured trains. His whimsicalities are drawn and written all over the iron plates. Here is "One for Oom Paul"—

> "The Fusiliers that guard this train
> Must hold their own with might and main;
> Take good aim, and make shots tell,
> And send all Dutchmen straight to ——"

—a very warm place.

Advancing very rapidly the Volunteer Cavalry, under Colonel Royston, with the Natal battery, drove in the Boer outposts at Modder's Spruit. A little later, or about 6.30 a.m., from a ridge 1500 yards off, the gunners began dropping shells around Eland's Laagte station. It was a complete surprise visit. Had the troops been on the kopje twenty minutes earlier the Boers would have been caught eating their breakfast. The screech of the first

shell brought the enemy out-of-doors, from the village houses and the railway buildings, and as quickly as legs could speed they went north, towards a rough group of hills about a mile and a half away on the east side of the line. The direct approach led over flat, broken, alluvial ground, cut up by gulleys. Between two low mountain chains rose a well-marked conical hill, beneath which laagered Boer waggons showed where lay the enemy's camp. Our cavalry and batteries advanced, fusillading and pounding the fleeing enemy, and assailing his camp, which began swarming with men like an angry beehive. The first good piece of luck was that nearly all the prisoners caught by the Boers when they seized Eland's Laagte station and the collieries and captured the two trains, came running in. Among them were the proprietor, manager, and foremen of the mines, Mr. Mitchell Innes, Mr. D. Harris, and others, and the railroad officials, together with a Boer sergeant and his fifteen prisoners. From these we learned of the strength and disposition of the Boer forces, namely, about 2000 men, with three or more field guns. The escaped fugitives and several Boer prisoners were at once sent back into Ladysmith. I gleaned from them at the moment that General Kock was in command of the post, that Commandant de Miellof and the German Colonel (?) Schiel, with many of the Johannesburg commando, were in front of us. Mr. Harris told me that they had all—some

thirty-seven British subjects—been court-martialed the previous day. They were brought before General Kock, who sat at a table eating a mutton-chop with several of his associates. As the General disdained to speak English, an interpreter was brought in, and through the latter they were warned and counselled neither to attempt to escape nor hold communication with the British. An oath also was exacted from them that they would do nothing calculated to injure the Republics, and would obey their officers. The Boers obtained 300 pounds of dynamite from the mines' magazine, but Mr. Harris happily managed to hide from them several hundredweight of gunpowder.

Realizing from their scouts that they had only a small force before them, the Boer leaders rallied their men, and opened a hot fire with cannon, maxims, and small arms from their position at our advancing troops. Their horsemen hurried forward to throw themselves as skirmishers upon our flanks. Within an hour General French had to withdraw his men stage by stage. Our little 7-pounder guns were using black powder, disclosing their whereabouts, whereas the excellent 9-centimètre guns of the enemy, fired from cover, were not easy to locate. We were hard pressed back to the high ground north of Modder's Spruit, the Boer cannon upsetting a limber and waggon, but failing to reach the armoured train. Then, the ground favouring a defensive fight, the troops were halted and

extended, so as to protect front and flanks. The Boers did not attempt to bring on their cannon, so our batteries and troopers were able to effectively stop the enemy's further advance. Having means to tap the wires, General French sent in a report to Sir George White, and asked for small reinforcements to enable him to carry the Boer position. From 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. the troops remained almost idle, the Boers evincing a distaste for our shrapnel; it had caught numbers of them upon the hillsides north-east of Modder's Spruit, which flows eastward.

About 1.40 p.m. our long-awaited reinforcements arrived, some by road, the infantry by rail. They included another British field battery of 15-pounders, several squadrons of the Dragoons, Lancers, and Volunteers, with some of the Devons and Gordon Highlanders. Our infantry now numbered two and a half battalions, and was under the command of Colonel Ian Hamilton, whose practical knowledge and experience of Boer tactics has led him never to send his men forward to fight in close Aldershot formations. His successful plan is to let the infantry advance in very widely separated skirmish order—line following line at intervals sufficient to secure cover, fill up gaps, and yield support when necessary. The infantry were detrained on the east of the railway over a mile south of Modder's Spruit. At once the Imperial Light Horse, the Natal Mounted Rifles, with others,

followed by the 5th Lancers, rode eastward towards the low hills where a few Boers had ventured down under wall cover to bushwhack the patrols and trains. These the volunteers sent helter-skelter, after a few shots, into the hill fastnesses. The Manchester regiment and the Gordons set their faces eastward, and began smartly ascending the ridges running about a mile away, and parallel with the railway, whilst the Devons marched upon the low ground bordering the east side of the line. Behind them moved a field battery, whilst the Natal mountain guns went with their compatriot volunteers to scale the eastern ridges which trended north in almost unbroken crests to the Boer position at Eland's Laagte. The 5th Dragoon Guards, with a few squadrons of volunteers and a field battery, moved forward upon our left. Roughly the advance was, on the extreme right, the Imperial Light Horse and Volunteers, supported by the Mounted Battery and 5th Lancers. Behind these, in order named, though that was the result of a slight error, were the Manchesters, on the right, and the Gordons on the left. Again, in the valley on the Highlanders' left were the stout-backed Devons, with the battery, and farther left, across the railway, the Dragoon Guards and others. General White, with his staff, arrived upon the field about 4 p.m. He remained for an hour watching the operations, but did not take the direction of affairs from General French.

It was a pretty panoramic show from 2 p.m. until 3 p.m., for the sun still shone, to see the troops marching onward, line following line along the valley up the bare slopes, and sweeping over the crests of the hills. Cavalry, guns, and infantry, they held along as if it had been a home field-day, the whip-like snapping of rifles and the wild-bee hum of the bullets neither disturbing their drill-like order, nor the rhythm and swing of their marching strides. But soon there was another song to sing, as the darkening thunder-clouds gathered, and evening began setting in ere the afternoon was spent. The Boer fire upon the eastern ridges grew in volume, though as yet it gained little in accuracy and deadliness. At 3.20 p.m. one of our batteries began firing, throwing shrapnel far beyond the spruit, and searching the ridges in front of the advancing infantry. Five minutes afterwards the Boer cannon paid our troops a similar compliment, though for the most part their shells failed to burst, and many plugged harmlessly into the veldt. My cart and horses came in for much attention from their gunners, and it had to be sent to the rear for a while, as it had several close shaves from the Boer shells. I continued on afoot with the infantry, keeping with the Devons until later in the action, when, like others, I climbed the ridge. As soon as the Manchesters and the Gordons reached the main hill chain, which was studded with angular chunks of rock and stone, the battle of Eland's

Laagte became an affair of deadly earnest. Bravely pushing ahead upon the extreme right, the Imperial Light Horse came under the shell fire of the Boer guns, and were held and turned for a short time by the enemy's sharpshooters. But the British infantry, sweeping onward, relieved the pressure, and subsequently the Light Horse did as much for their soldier comrades.

The artillery and infantry fire by 4 p.m. had reached the whirlwind stage, the fight raging from end to end of our lines. But Tommy was out for the day, and meant to beat the Boers; and so, in the storm and driving tropical rain, he pushed ahead, the enemy skipping from cover to cover, like rabbits when the hunt is on. Our gunners, as the range diminished, almost mastered the Boer artillery fire, and did not omit to search the rocky cover in front of the advancing infantry. Sweeping all before them, the Gordons and Manchesters went on, the Devons, as yet scarcely engaged, but performing the indispensable duty of guarding the flank and menacing the enemy by a direct frontal attack. As they drew in to the Boer camp, every soldier of them secured cover by lying prone behind one or other of the innumerable ant-hills that dotted the plain. These little mounds of hard mud are here from eighteen to thirty inches in height, and quite bullet-proof. But, as the Boers said afterwards, it was impossible to see the khaki-clad infantry when they lay down. The Highlanders

afforded the best mark when they stood up to advance, because of their kilts and sporrans. Perhaps the military authorities may note that there is no good reason why, upon active service, they should not don khaki kilts and sporrans. If Guardsmen may change their coats and trousers, Highlanders should be permitted to change their kilts for the nonce. So, too, the officers were marked down by their swords and Sam Brown belts, and parties of Boers, told off to shoot leaders, found no difficulty in distinguishing officers from privates. Many years ago I suggested the wisdom of replacing the sword by a light repeating rifle. I see that Colonel Baden-Powell has done so with the Mafeking force.

The tug-of-war came in the darkening. Shouts and cheers mingled with badinage; Tommy Atkins called to Tommy as they hurried onward towards the highest shoulder. Downward the hill slopes, at first easily, then at a sharp angle, to the neck. The Boers made a fierce, plucky struggle to maintain their ground. I saw several of them standing up, evidently encouraging their fellows, and others came rushing in dozens up from the near slope to take their place in the battle. But the "independent" firing of our soldiers was sure and withering, and Boer after Boer, hit by Lee-Metfords, sank and fell, and the troops swept rapidly on. Then there was a roar like the noise of heavy ocean surge, and Highlanders and Manchesters, their now fixed

bayonets gleaming in the flash of lightning and musketry, with Imperial Light Horse, ran forward, and the last ridge was won. Boers who had fought and shot down our men up till within fifteen paces of us now rose from the rocks, and throwing up their hands, asked for quarter. Colonel Hamilton and his officers saw and protected them, although these men scarcely deserved clemency under the ordinary war rules. Our losses, so far, had been comparatively few—nothing like so many as those of the enemy.

It was at this moment that something took place which might have proved disastrous but for the individual hardihood of the British soldier. In a few seconds after the top was gained, with another roar of cheering and shouting, Manchesters and Highlanders ran charging down the hill. The Devons also rose and ran forward, now well within five hundred yards' fire, rapidly at the enemy upon their front. Two or three hundred of the Boers made a brief attempt to save the situation, but were beaten. Suddenly the fusillade almost ceased, and the bugles sounded "Cease fire," Colonel Hamilton and the officers shouting to the men to stop, as it was all over. The Boers had hoisted a white flag from near their camp laager. The Highlanders, who were well down the hill and exposed to fire upon their flank from a ridge to the north, stood up. All that went on was the blare of bugles, "Cease fire," blurred by broken

musketry from other parts of the field, to right and left. Suddenly there was sprung upon the troops a virulent fusillade of Mausers, directed by Boers, who had fled to the opposite crest in rear, from the neck, the conical hillsides, and further ridge. Officers and men dropped in every direction, and the tale of our killed and wounded rose by scores. There was practically no cover nearer than a hundred and fifty yards, and many of the soldiers had remained upon the crown of the ridge. Back, then, in groups helter-skelter the troops ran for shelter. Major Brook, who had been wounded going downhill, was luckily lifted up and carried back by Lord Ava and others, and placed behind a rock. That act resulted in the saving of his life. Without orders or word of command the Tommies halted upon the crest, faced about, and recommenced the fight, now thoroughly angry at the trick played them.

Evidently the Boers were fighting for night and opportunity to escape. They had miscalculated their weakness. Our right pushed in, so did the Devons, right up to the face of the camp, their fire scattering the Boers clinging to the rocks. Highlanders and Manchesters speedily settled the enemy, who had fallen back upon the conical hill, and the Devons soon disposed of the rest. Dargai was not in it for the fierceness of the contest. At last, near six o'clock, the Devons rose, cheered, and rushed the last defences of the Boers, getting first

Photo by] THE ROLL-CALL AFTER THE BATTLE. THE FIGHT AT ELAND'S LAAGTE. [*D. Barnett.*

up to where two of the enemy's nine-centimètre guns were, the gunners, dead and dying, lying around. In the dark, stumbling, the Manchesters and Highlanders charged down nearly at the same moment, and Eland's Laagte was triumphantly won. The cavalry had been biding their time, and, although it was now almost pitch dark, the Dragoons on one hand, and the Lancers upon the other, rode into the flying Boers. A squadron of each got them with lance and sword, the former behind the hill, the other beyond Eland's Laagte Station. In the darkness they thrust and cut, following the enemy for two miles, stumbling forward. Near the enemy's hospital, in rear of the conical hill, a Boer ran out, shouting to the troopers, "Keep away, this is the hospital," whilst the flying enemy escaped around the tents, and the would-be philanthropist covertly fired his revolver from under his coat at the soldiers. He was caught in the act by an officer and shot dead.

A victory is never assured until the field has been gone over. We had lost severely in killed and wounded. The Gordons went in 425 strong. Only three of the officers escaped untouched. Their casualties were 115, four officers killed and seven wounded. The Imperial Light Horse mustered 240. They lost Colonel Chisholm, and Major Sampson was severely wounded. Their casualties were eight killed and forty wounded, including eight officers. But the enemy had suffered

far greater losses; nearly 200 of their dead lay upon the field, and their wounded must have totalled over thrice as many more. Most of their leaders had been killed, wounded, or were subsequently made prisoners. The roll of captives was a long one. Their leader, General Kock, lay dangerously wounded, and not far removed were his two brothers, a son, and a nephew. Colonel Schiel, Commandant Pinnaar, Joubert's nephew, De Witt Hamer, Ben Viljoen, Dr. Coster, and many others had been killed. There were all around the evidences of precipitate flight, loose horses, saddlery, their two cannon, personal baggage, arms, ammunition, and waggons. Underneath tents and waggons were lying wounded, unwounded, and dead Boers. Passing down the hill, I saw a stalwart elderly man, with full grey beard, lying wounded. Something possessed me to ask if he were Judge Kock. "No," he answered; "I am the father of Judge Kock. Will you get me a drink, and something to put under my head? Your men have hurt me," he said, in excellent English. I then knew it was the Boer leader, or General, and I called out to the Staff. Meanwhile, he was assisted in every way possible, and a mattress was brought, on which he was laid, as he could not be moved in the dark over the steep rough ground. A tarpaulin was also spread over him to ward off the rain.

Having made up my mind to try and find my way back to town, pitch-dark as the night was,

though nearly everybody else decided to bivouac upon the battlefield, General French dictated the following message, and gave it me to convey to Sir George White in Ladysmith: "I have taken the position. Rather severe losses. Brook wounded in the leg. Have taken enemy's artillery, three guns. Am occupying enemy's camp and securing hills around till morning. Shall wire you, if possible. I intend during night to place detachment in the station (railway) to secure same, and bring trains up into station; get ready to repair line at daybreak through to mines if possible. Shall try to move as many wounded as I can. Probably impossible to-night. General Kock, father of Judge Kock, wounded."

I reached headquarters with the message, eighteen miles away, about 11.30 p.m., the roads being terrible and the spruits running free. Next morning I rode out to revisit the stricken field, where most of our men and the enemy's wounded had lain through the cold, wet, black, starless night—a woeful night of nights—their life's blood ebbing. For the unwounded it was bad enough. Chilled and drenched to the skin, it was impossible, except by constant movement, to keep warm. For dying and wounded, calling for succour, their tortures must have been dreadful. A trooper of a Volunteer force, stretched alone away upon the hillside, recovering consciousness, fired his rifle over a dozen times to attract attention. He was nearly killed, for an alarm was

created that the enemy were returning to "snipe;" but somebody went out, discovered the cause of the shooting, and brought the poor fellow in. I found General French and his whole force hastily evacuating the position, upon the strength of information and orders from headquarters. The enemy were said to be coming on again. Hurriedly the wounded were entrained and sent into Ladysmith. The enemy's guns, several of his battle-flags—at least three, probably five—and his waggons, and some of his stores, were also removed. Our cavalry were also recalled from pursuit, and returned with about 200 prisoners—an hour or so more would have doubled the number. So also would the victory have been more complete had darkness, on the night of the battle, not descended so swiftly. Unfortunately, some of the enemy's nine-centimètre cannon, and a quantity of ammunition, rifles, and cartridges, had to be left behind with other things, as there were no means of removing them. And it turned out there was no need for haste, as the Boers were nowhere near, and showed no disposition to dispute the, for us, victorious issue at Eland's Laagte. It was a hard-fought battle, won mainly by the British soldiers, the General having given them their direction and orders and left the result in their safe hands. Given a fair field, man to man, Tommy is more than a match for the Boer, even at the latter's own game—and the Boer now knows the fact.

CHAPTER IV

FARQUHAR'S FARM AND NICHOLSON'S NEK

Pietermaritzburg, November 3, 1899

EVENTS in this part of the field of war have tripped over each other in the running, and it is difficult to make record of them. Personally, I am writing in the greatest haste, having had little time for rest, let alone letter-writing, since the victorious column was retired from Eland's Laagte on October 21. There were wounded friends to see to, Boer prisoners to learn something from, and an effort had to be made to reopen communications with the correspondent tied up in Dundee. What with the blocking of the cables and the hanging up of Press messages for twenty-two hours, and the refined particularities of the military Press censors lest the British public should know anything in detail or general which got published broadcast in the South African newspapers, a journalist's life was not a happy one. He was an object of more suspicion, or, at any rate, more to be guarded against, than any of the hundred and one Boer spies and

sympathizers that went in and out, strutting about unhampered. Nay, I have since reason to know absolutely that they and others sent innocent-looking private telegrams which imparted exact news of all that was going forward and that the military wished to keep secret. One good thing was done in Ladysmith; although there was no secure provision for defensive works made, the Army surgeons, at any rate, provided wisely and well for the reception and treatment of the expected wounded. Churches, the Town Hall, schoolrooms, and other buildings were turned into carefully fitted-up hospitals, and tents and marquees were erected hard by for an overflow. An engine and dynamos were got and erected, and the larger hospital lit by electric light. The operating rooms were provided with every known scientific appliance, and even the Röntgen ray apparatus was made ready for instant use.

On the Sunday following Eland's Laagte there were big church parades. But meanwhile the patrols were keeping an eye upon the enemy, and occasionally exchanging shots. By Monday, October 23, native and Boer rumours begun to flow afresh that the enemy were moving forward. The Free State Boers and General Joubert's column were said to be drawing nearer, and the Natal police reports confirmed the news. So far the Boers have interposed little obstacle to the going to and fro of Kaffirs. Rather, I should say, they let them pass out of their lines, but are chary of allowing them to

return. On Tuesday morning, October 24, General White, accompanied by Generals Hunter and French, set out with a column of all arms along the Newcastle road. It was in orders that the force was to proceed to Modder's Spruit, ten miles north, and there bivouac, remaining out for three days if necessary and giving the enemy battle. We heard afterwards that the object was to divert Joubert and the Free Staters' attention from the Dundee column, then making its way back to rejoin the Ladysmith command. A start was made at 5 a.m. The 5th Lancers were told off to keep connection up the left with Ladysmith, the 19th Hussars to watch our left front, a few of the 5th Dragoon Guards and Volunteer mounted bodies our front and right. We had got no great distance from town—about five miles out—when the enemy were heard firing upon our scouts. Here is the composition of General White's force, not including the armoured train :— 5th Dragoon Guards, 5th Lancers, 19th Hussars, Natal Carbineers, Border Mounted Rifles, Natal Mounted Rifles, Imperial Light Horse and Mounted Infantry, two batteries of Field Artillery, and 10th Mountain Battery ; and for infantry, the Devons, 2nd King's Royal Rifles, Liverpools, and Gloucesters.

Very speedily it was found that the Boers had chosen a position upon the hills on the west side of the railway. Whether they were part of Joubert's forces or Free Staters was not very clear, but the

evidence pointed to their mainly belonging to Transvaal commandoes, who were effecting a junction with their neighbours. While the cavalry held them upon the right, the guns went forward and returned the enemy's fire. The Boers had moved to the north-west of Modder's Spruit, and were holding a bold hill near Pepworth and Reid's Farm, known locally as Tintwainyona (Zulu, "touch the birds"). To the south-west was a lower hill called Notwatshyan, both standing to the eastward of Matowans Hook, which is marked upon good maps. By 7.20 the cavalry action became quite brisk, and as the infantry marched up at 8.15 a.m. the Boers began dropping harmless shells near them. A battery of ours trotted forward from the low ground regardless of their fire, and came into action upon a ridge south of their position, the range 2500 yards. Their shooting was splendid, and before 8.35 they had silenced the Boer guns and cleared the hill, top and sides, of all curious onlookers. To thoroughly brush the hill a second battery, our 2nd Field Battery, opened at 8.45 from a position facing Tintwainyona. The Boers could be seen streaming to the rear, and moving over upon Notwatshyan. Our infantry were sent in facing the two hills, and it was put about that the position would be taken by assault. Part of the Gloucesters were upon the left, near the Neck, or Pepworth and Reid's Farm, which the Boers had looted that and the previous day. Next the

Gloucesters were the Devons, the Rifles, and some more of the Gloucesters (one company), with the Liverpools in reserve.

Our men advanced to the ridge, but received orders to go no further. The distance from the foot of the hill varied, as the ridge ran, from 1200 to 1600 yards. A wearisome day ensued, each side potting at the other, and the guns now and again banging away. I looked into the valley, and saw a Boer waggon 200 yards below that had been caught between the forces. No one stood near it, and so some of the Volunteers went down to examine its contents. The Boers gave them a warm reception, a number of their sharpshooters being concealed behind walls and rocks; and I, too, was glad to hobble back, for at 900 yards their shooting was passably good. Between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. part of our left tried to pass up a donga and scale Tintwainyona from the southern end. Instantly bands of Boers, unseen before, arose around Notwashyan and caught them, sharply checking the movement. But there was no desire evinced to get to serious business with the enemy, and so, although the fusillade grew very hot between then and noon, it was but an interchange of shots, void of special significance. A Maxim or two was pressed into service, but they merely added to the din, without increasing the casualties of the enemy very materially. What was done in that way was accomplished by the gunners and the rifle-fire.

Unhappily, towards the latter part of the day (and, it is said, without orders), a company of the Gloucesters proceeded up the valley and came under cross-fire, when they suffered severely, among their killed being the Colonel, E. P. Wilford. General White and Staff watched the action throughout. About 2.15 p.m. the whole force was slowly withdrawn, the Boers meanwhile firing briskly and trying to turn our left in vain. Thereafter all the troops returned quietly to Ladysmith, the Boers not following up; it was stated that the object of the march was achieved, namely, to prevent the Boers moving to attack the returning Dundee column. Our total losses killed and wounded were over the hundred. I can form no accurate judgment of what casualties the enemy sustained, but they were not inferior to our own, for our shrapnel was fatal.

On October 25 our cavalry were out again, and ambulances assisted in bringing in the wounded. A detachment also made junction with the Dundee column. Next day General Yule's men came in, and proceeded to occupy the old camp. On Friday, October 27, news was brought that the Boers were to the east of Mounts Umbulwana and Lombard or Lombard's Kop, both of which are but a little way to the east of Ladysmith, and were practically the keys of the town upon that side. Small forts manned with good guns would have kept an enemy from hastily attacking from that

direction. It was said that it was Lucas Meyer's men who had hurried after the Dundee column. On the north and west the enemy's laagers or camps were reported to have been pitched nearer Ladysmith. There was a report, too, that they were moving to Pieter's Crossing, or Nelthorpe, to sever the line to Maritzburg. Before daybreak General French occupied both Lombard's and Bulwana Kops with strong cavalry picquets. In the forenoon he advanced with a column, including the Lancers, Dragoons, Volunteer mounted troops, three batteries, and most of Colonel Ian Hamilton's infantry brigade, beyond Bulwana. Passing through the neck between Lombard's Kop and Bulwana, provided as before with three days' emergency rations, the column went several miles to the south-east. The troopers were in time to meet and drive back a number of Boers riding towards Nelthorpe by way of the south end of Bulwana. It was found that the enemy's laagers stretched away to the eastward, and that there were between 3000 and 4000 Boers, with at least one battery. The infantry secured a good position, and desultory rifle firing began between the advance lines, and continued till near sunset.

There were no orders to attack upon our side, and it looked as if the enemy would not be easily got at. The force bivouacked in the valley behind (east of) Bulwana. During the evening General French and Colonel Hamilton arranged a plan

of night attack. At 3 a.m. the infantry were to assault the enemy's position with the bayonet, whilst the cavalry stormed their laagers. Just about 2 a.m., as they were preparing to start, orders came from headquarters for the column to return at once to Ladysmith. They arrived in town by daylight. That night (Saturday, October 28) we learned that the Boers had broken the inlet pipes of the reservoir water supply, and that Ladysmith would have to turn to wells and the shallow, turbid river for that commodity. Sunday, October 29, was a needed day of rest for the troops, many of whom had been either marching, or called upon to stand to arms, for hours at a stretch, often for half the night.

Monday, October 30, was the day of the battle of Ladysmith. The genesis of that event was that now, as the enemy was near in sufficient numbers, was the time to deliver a crushing blow, after which no Boer would be seen for a time within twenty miles of the town. The plan, apparently, was to deal alike with the Boers under Lucas Meyer on the eastward, the Free Staters towards Nicholson's Nek on the north-west, and the Transvaalers under Joubert about Modder's Spruit. It had been evident to me and others upon Sunday, if not Saturday, that the Boers were occupying a barn-roof-shaped hill this side of Tintwainyona, or Pepworth and Reid's Place, sometimes called Signal Hill. Nay, there was little question but that they had brought

down and mounted a big gun there—their 40-pounder—and, having chosen their position, meant worrying Ladysmith.

The dispositions for attack of each of the separate bodies of troops named were as follows:—Under Lieut.-Colonel Carleton, assisted by Major Adye, of the Staff: No. 10 Mountain Battery, a few Hussars, six companies of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, four and a half companies of the Gloucesters, with the usual details, supplies, and ambulance, were to leave the camp about midnight and proceed in the direction of Nicholson's Nek, to occupy a position calculated to protect the old camp and block the flight of the Boers from Modder's Spruit. Under Major-General Hunter, a small cavalry force, mostly of Volunteers, two field batteries, the Natal Mountain Battery, and an infantry brigade under Colonel Grimwood, made up of the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade. The Leicesters and Liverpools started at 2 a.m. to attack or hold in check General Lucas Meyer's commando east of Bulwana. That force, it was found, had swelled to 7000 men with two batteries. By an unlucky accident a battery and the Liverpools passed down the west side of Bulwana instead of following their comrades through the neks between Lombard's Kop and Bulwana, and were unable to assist them at a critical juncture. General White himself conducted two infantry brigades, Colonel Ian Hamilton's and Colonel Howard's, with the regular cavalry

under General French, six batteries of Field Artillery, with a large following of ambulance waggons, dhooli bearers, reserve ammunition, etc., before daybreak along the Newcastle Road. All the troops carried three days' supplies.

Cleverly and silently the central column, under General White, was led and screened under the crest of a low, rocky ridge to the right of the railway, and about 2500 yards from the Boer central position upon Signal Hill. That natural obstacle presents the end of its barn-shaped top towards Ladysmith, whereas Bulwana trends in parallel line with the railway. The batteries were sent by a circuit to our right front, and found ground in a low slope behind a screen of scrub mimosa. It did not strike me as being a particularly good position, for the range was long (about 4000 yards, I think), the Boer hill was high, and could not be raked, whilst it was difficult to discern the exact effect of their own fire. Part of Howard's infantry, the 1st and 2nd Battalions King's Royal Rifles, and the Dublin Fusiliers went forward to support the guns, and turn the enemy's left by-and-by. Hamilton's brigade (Gordons, Devons, 4th Battalion Rifle Brigade, and the Manchester) lay with the Ambulance Column under the low hill close by the roadway, about two and a half miles from town. Upon their left front lay the enemy, south-east of Matawan's Hook, their chief laager, which I saw hidden behind a spacious amphitheatre-like crest, near

Notwatshyan, but to the south of it. The spot was well selected, for there was good grazing and plenty of water near, whilst they overlooked and commanded the railway and the road to the north. Possibly, catching sight of the war balloon, which had been making observations on Sunday, and was again making an ascent near the railway station, or it may have been the stream of waggons coming over the ridge behind which Ladysmith lies, the Boers began the action at 5.10 a.m. by hurling a shell from their 40-pounder, or "Long Tom," as it had come to be known by. With a loud screech the missile plunged down near the railway, but did not burst. They followed this prelude up with several other rounds, dropping the shells near the station, sending several into the town, and one or two towards cavalry seen on our left rear. None of the residents had left Ladysmith; but, as few of the Boer shells exploded, the people took the bombardment very coolly. An old lady had one of them come hurtling through her house. "Oh," she said, "this is a little too warm;" so she took her canary bird, walked out, and sat down under the hill on the north side of the town.

I ascended the low hill behind which the infantry lay. On Signal Hill I could make out considerable numbers of Boers peeping over walls and rough earthworks they had built. "Long Tom" was in a sort of circular-shaped pit, protected by thick walls, over which his long black muzzle pointed at

an angle of 45° to the sky. At first they fired him with smokeless, but latterly black powder was used. Nearer the town on the crest were two 9-centimètre guns, and at either end of the hill a machine cannon, protected by steel shields, stood in view. These, however, were not fired till later in the day. In a few minutes the Boer field-pieces began firing, directing their attention, after a while, chiefly to General White's right and guns. Our batteries got to work at 5.25 a.m., but very many of the shrapnel fell short, exploding harmlessly against the hillside. Now and again a shell would burst on the crest and clear away the Boer onlookers. As the morning wore on our fire grew hotter, but the enemy's artillerymen stuck manfully to their guns. "Long Tom" was soonest partially silenced, and those in the work must have suffered from the hail of shrapnel. But the gunners serving the field-pieces were of sterner stuff. Several of them were killed or wounded; but sometimes three men, sometimes but two, would come forward, load, lay, and fire their shells at our batteries. They were forced to seek shelter, duck, and hide; but again and again, till the end of the action, they would return and fire away at us. A Boer leader using field-glasses stood upon a wall between his field-pieces for hours, directing the action, and the batteries never once managed to reach him with shrapnel. I failed to understand what was amiss, because heretofore our artillery fire has been unequalled. Perhaps the

longest interval during which the Boer guns were silenced was between 6.30 a.m. and 7.15 a.m. They were also breaking out afresh—first one, then the other—both using smokeless powder, but doing little actual damage with their shells. "Long Tom" burst forth anew at 7.45 a.m. They became silent only to break out later. I could see every movement of the enemy: when they fetched their ammunition, their scudding to the rear when our fire grew too warm, the arrival of reinforcements from the west, and their despatch of supports to the right and left.

It was in the form of an inverted letter U that General White strove to thrust back the Boers—Colonels Carleton upon the left, the main force in the centre, and Hunter on the right. But the U got twisted into something like an S. Colonel Howard was ordered forward to the right of the guns, and with the Rifles, their Maxim, and the Dublins gained initial successes rapidly. He swung his troops over the low ground to the north and made a lodgment upon a low crest running east and west that would have carried him behind the north corner of Signal Hill. The Boers were evidently desperately apprehensive of this move and achievement. Hastily they summoned reinforcements, and after an hour or two stiff infantry fighting, they overlapped Howard's right and left. Two more batteries were deflected to assist his advance, but the enemy in large numbers clung pertinaciously

to their cover, and the field-pieces upon Signal Hill lent their friends what little aid they could. I am only describing one phase of the action—that which I saw nearest and best. From early morning there had been heard heavy and continuous musketry firing in the direction taken by Carleton's column. The enemy could be detected clustering and swarming upon the hillsides in that vicinity. By-and-by one heard the boom of guns mingle with the sharp reverberation of the incessant musketry. This went on from before 6 a.m., and was loudest between 7 a.m. and 11 a.m. So, too, we heard behind us the din of battle beyond Lombard's Kop, and we saw the cavalry flashing heliographic signals to the General. The clamour of battle, both there and upon our own front, came closer. The Boers also appeared to dread that we should pass by to the east, and so sent men into the low ground south of Pepworth and Reid's Farm to engage the outpost of the Devons.

Howard was being hard pressed on the right by 9 a.m., for some of Meyer's men were creeping over Lombard's Kop. Three batteries, the Gordons, and, later on, the Rifles, were sent to his assistance; but the Boers, too, had brought up guns, machine cannon, and many riflemen. There was a fearful threshing and spluttering as the Hotchkiss and Maxim cannon bang-banged their small shells at our infantry. It became known that Carleton's column was in a tight place, and that our column

and Hunter's would probably return to Ladysmith. In truth, under the cross fire, Grimwood's infantry had fallen back upon the neck and slopes of Bulwana so fast that a number of waggons became stuck, and had to be abandoned in the deep spruit crossings. Still Howard did not feel inclined to stir, and Colonel Hamilton's column had as yet been hardly engaged or scratched. Their cover was good, and all day long the Boers never discovered where we lay on the reverse of the low crest, watching their every movement. At 9.50 p.m. "Long Tom" began again, and everybody was wondering when the bluejackets, long expected by many, would turn up with their big guns. It was about that very hour they arrived in Ladysmith, and detrained, bringing with them a battery of heavy long-range 12-pounders and two 4.7 quick-firing cannon. They detrained, secured ox-waggons, and had three of their 12-pounders upon the field shortly after 11 a.m., but they were turned back without getting a shot. By 10.45 the battle on the right centre was raging fast and furious, rifles and cannon noisily contending. The order had gone forth, and very sedately, their dhoolie bearers, ammunition mules, and water-carts, in long, thin, skirmish lines, Howard's men were retiring. Fighting grimly, not hastening a step, but in slow march, they came in.

I had ridden over to see that corner of the field. The cool steadiness of the men was magnificent, and though the Boers fired rapidly, and their

machine cannon made a tremendous row, the British soldiers took matters very leisurely. On the left the Rifles had a tight corner, where they were exposed to a cross fire ; but they, too, dawdled along, and, like the others, took every precaution to bring in their wounded. In the bush and among the rocks possibly a few were left unseen. By 11.10 a.m. the retirement on the right was almost completed, Colonel Hamilton getting leave to hold the ridge on his front to cover the farther withdrawal of the force. The enemy did all they could, but our centre never budged, and held them easily, though they plunged shell after shell, with the whole power of their batteries—"Long Tom" included—at the troops. By 1 p.m. most of the troops were back within the so-called lines of Ladysmith, and Captain Lambton's bluejackets, with their 12-pounder from the hill, had silenced "Long Tom" and shut down their lesser-fry guns. A little later the column that went beyond Bulwana came in, and the fighting and firing, seven miles away, of Carleton's column went on until near 2 p.m., when they were forced to surrender to superior force. The bolting of the ammunition mules and No. 10 Battery mules was a serious misfortune, and might have induced them to turn back ; but possibly they calculated upon the success and advance of the central column to their relief. It has been no new feature for native drivers to bolt in a tight corner, and Carleton's column

suffered from that unpreventable accident. It was a day of misadventures, all their actions miscarrying. The battle was waged over a circuit quite ten miles in length, in broken country.

Our losses, fortunately, were relatively light, apart from the loss and capture of Carleton's column. The Boers' casualties in killed and wounded were not less than our own. Recognizing that, with the occupation of Mount Bulwana by the Boers, and the advance of Joubert and the Free Staters on the north and west, the investment of Ladysmith and General White's whole command was only a question of hours that evening, I left town, leaving, however, representatives behind to chronicle the progress of the siege. There is plenty of ammunition, forage, and provisions in the town to enable the garrison, if careful, to endure a two months' siege. The only pity is that all non-combatants, particularly women and children, were not ordered away when Dundee fell. Yesterday the Boers cut the railway and telegraph communication between Ladysmith and Maritzburg at Pieters Crossing. To-day (Friday), November 3, our little garrison has evacuated Colenso, and given over the possession of the big bridges over the Tugela to the enemy. Our troops are now trying to make a stand at Estcourt, whither I am proceeding, and hope to open some sort of communication with my friends in Ladysmith.

CHAPTER V

BELEAGUERED LADYSMITH

Estcourt, November 13, 1899

FULLY thirty miles, as the crow flies, almost due north from Estcourt, lies beleaguered Ladysmith. Standing upon the hilltops near here, we can hear the daily booming of besieged and besiegers' cannon, and when the air is still, or the breeze is favourable, the threshing sound of musketry. Ladysmith has been invested by the enemy since the beginning of November, and Sir George White and his troops are encompassed in almost basin lands, for it is the characteristic or necessity of South African towns that they must be built in low ground to secure access to water. He and his men found themselves in a defenceless place, and one difficult to make strongly defensible because of its surroundings. Many causes led to the General and Staff deciding to make a stand there against the invading, overrunning Boers.

That the hardship of such a position for defence is great, I know. What with men, cavalry, and

THE MARKET HOUSE AND PART OF THE MARKET SQUARE, LADYSMITH.

cattle, all cribbed in a limited area, with no real cover to screen them from the enemy's observation and fire, the task Sir George White has undertaken is no easy one. It is not so much any actual risk of their being unable to repel direct attacks of the Boers; but the conditions under which the garrison must continue to fight and live on, until a relief column arrives, are vexatious in the extreme. And, so far as I can at present see, it will be near the end of November before the pressure will be lifted from Ladysmith. From here, rather than from the Cape side, Joubert will have to be made relax his grip upon Ladysmith, vacating Lombards and Bulwana Mountains, and falling back towards the fastnesses of the Drakensberg Mountains.

I promised a few extracts from Kock's diary—not the General's, but a relative. It fell into my hands, and I have had part translated. The writer of it was on the staff of the late Boer leader. After describing two days spent commandeering men and supplies, he writes:—

"Left with General Kock and Judge Kock for Standerton. Learned that two women refugees died *en route*.

"*October* 5, *Sandsspruit*.—Food is very scarce, water bad, nearly undrinkable, with the result that several men are suffering from diarrhœa. At Bodas Drift he (General Kock) received a communication from the Free State Commandants Prinslow and De Villers, to place himself in communication with

them to act in view of coming events. Commandant Viljoen took our reply ('All right') to them at Tanges Hill.

"*October* 7.—Communications were established on a permanent basis between the armies—Free State and Transvaal.

"*October* 8 (*Sunday*).—Passed calmly. Went to church. Martin preached Luke xv. 24, and Deut. xxxiii. 27. Told the burghers they were going to ensure the independence of their country. Rumoured that the English Ministers have resigned owing to the cabal. Reported that the Queen refused to sign the declaration of war. This is dissatisfying to the burghers, because most of them had pictured to themselves that the English Tommy Atkins would be beaten on his back (flogged). For which he had longed, as well as to be greeted, by the ladies in Durban.

"*October* 10.—Took Bothas Pass into our hands.

"*October* 12.—Sent 600 men into Natal; also occupied Quagga's Nek."

These are but a few extracts. The diary was not written in on October 21, the day of Eland's Laagte.

I append an extract of another kind, taken from a letter sent out of Ladysmith by a Volunteer to his wife a few days ago:—

"Just a few lines. We have not been able to get any news from the outer world. We have been

battered with cannon the whole time, with the result that they have done us absolutely no damage beyond killing a few, mostly natives, some horses, cattle, and a dog. Even as I write shells are bursting all round us, and don't seem to do any harm. We have over six months' provisions, so can sit tight and say nothing. Many days we don't even take the trouble to return their shots. We let them blaze away. It amuses them, and does us no hurt at all. In fact, we should miss it if they were to stop. Our two last runners were caught by the Boers. The Boers say that they have only lost three men since the beginning of the war. As a matter of fact, the number we have buried of their dead runs into hundreds."

At Estcourt I employed native runners, Kaffirs, and even fire-balloons to try and get into communication with Ladysmith. Day by day the difficulties of penetrating the Boer lines increased, the enemy, learning of "the English post," placing a cordon of mounted men, extending from Lombard's Kop, round the south of the town, to near Walker's Hook. One or two "boys" have succeeded in getting out by watching the position of the Boer picquets before breaking through at night. Owing to the weather, and Ladysmith lying so low, heliographic signalling has so far proved a total failure. The messages exchanged have been with Boer heliographers, and only to-day, after interchanging camp compliments, our fellows bade the enemy "go

hang!" I made several trips to Colenso in what we all call "that death-trap," the armoured train, in order to facilitate the despatch and receipt of a Ladysmith post. Natal, hilly and mountainous, is the least suitable of countries for armoured trains.

Besides, those we have are poorly-extemporised affairs, though the best, perhaps, that could be done in a hurry. Imagine a few $\frac{5}{8}$-inch boiler-plates placed round the engine, and flat bogie-trucks boxed round seven feet high with similar sheets of iron or steel, and roughly loopholed—the whole painted khaki—and you have the armoured train. There being no doorways, to get inside one of those oblong iron boxes, which are quite uncovered at the top, you have to clamber up as best you can, gripping the loopholes and exterior fastenings. Egress has to be made in the same manner. They were all right against rifle-fire, except when in a cutting or passing under a hill, when an enemy might have you at his mercy by firing down into the open-topped trucks. It is a well-known lesson, also, that an armoured train, except in an absolutely flat country, is unsuited for scouting or attack, unless backed and flanked by a friendly force of cavalry and guns. Our armoured trains here are unprovided with Maxims or cannon.

Probably deeming that the substantial railway and road bridges over the Tugela at Colenso would be of use to them by-and-by, the Boer force which caused our people to retire from that point, made no

attempt to destroy either. Towards the end of the week, white and native reports made it plain that the enemy were crossing to the south of the Tugela at Colenso in considerable numbers. From their disposition and movements it was variously surmised that they were bent on a raiding expedition, intercepting our railway communications, or an attack upon our small Estcourt garrison, then comprising three infantry battalions (one being of Volunteers) and two Natal batteries of the indifferent, almost obsolete, 7 and 9-pounder muzzle-loaders. What a deplorable pity it is that these guns were not long ago consigned to the melting-pot or some ignoble use, such as kerb-post guards! Opposed to Boer machine cannon and Krupps, they have neither range nor fire-efficiency to enable the gunners to make a stand. And it has been plain for years, almost to "the man in the street," that the Boers had acquired many of the newest and best types of guns. Happily, our soldiers are keen, capable, and anxious to deal with the enemy. In the beginning it is the old, old story. Unaccustomed to the training of stern European schools, in many set over the men there is a lack of hard, practical knowledge and temperament for dealing with a cunning, mobile foe. No matter, it will be said, we live and learn, though at some cost to the nation in widows and orphans, not to speak of other losses. Believe me, there is widespread rejoicing that General Buller and other strong

fighting Generals have arrived, and that war's grim realities are to be enacted in deadly earnest.

However people may feel and behave in Durban or Maritzburg, amid the troops there is no feeling of apprehension about the enemy. The men have encountered the Boers on more than one occasion, and have their measure. With cavalry and guns sufficient to round the enemy up, so that the infantry can get at them, the result is certain victory if the numbers are at all equal. For the moment we are short of both these arms, but that defect is even now being made good. Yet there was a measure which could, and maybe should, have been adopted, that would have given us an excellent force of mounted men. In the neighbourhood 500, or even 1000 farmers and others, belonging to rifle-clubs, could have been called to arms. Each man of them knows the country, and as marksmen and sharp fellows they are more than a match for the Boers.

Within the last few days welcome reinforcements have landed in Natal, and Major-General Hildyard has, early this morning, arrived in Estcourt. Unfortunately, there was at first a disposition to keep the men down country until the whole division could be mobilized there. Pressing telegrams, however, sent by Colonel Long, R.A., at last led to the despatch of the first of several battalions, the West Yorks, to this place. The Boers were reported to be slowly advancing, and

there were indications that a body of them were passing from west to east, to go towards Weenen, and from there menace the Mooi River bridges and our communications. I felt sorry for the West Yorks, who were detrained at Maritzburg on Sunday afternoon. They remained in the station for five hours, resting, and were to come on here by the evening train. Orders, however, reached them to go into camp at Fort Napier at 10 p.m. There they remained until 2.30 a.m., when they were roused up, marched back about a mile to the railway, and entrained at 3.30 a.m. for Estcourt. A fine, sturdy lot of fellows Colonel Kitchener has brought with him. No fewer than 350 are Reservists, and therefore, seasoned soldiers. Comrades here were glad to see them, although the tension was not and could not be relieved, the whole force —officers and men—continuing to have to sleep in their boots.

Native scouts—Basutos and Swazis—brought in word that the enemy were some distance south of Colenso, and small bodies had advanced down the railway close to Frere, hence the precaution of standing ready. Had there been a cavalry force to have kept touch with the Boers, matters had been different. As it was, Colonel Martyn, who was in command of the mounted troops, had only about 130, all told, consisting of a few Mounted Infantry, Carbineers, Imperial Light Horse, and Police. Forts were constructed, trenches dug, and the welcome

acquisition of two long-range naval 12-pounders made it certain that a stand could be made against any ordinary small body of Boers. The armoured train went out as far as Frere, which is the summit station between here and Colenso, and returned reporting having seen the enemy. Reports were also brought in that bodies of the enemy were moving down the Weenen road, and, riding out, I saw parties of them within six miles of Estcourt. It was intimated that they had guns and were composed of two commandoes, one from Ermelo (Transvaalers), and the other a new body of Free Staters. That evening there was a small exodus of civilians from Estcourt, and night-dresses were not worn when retiring to rest.

CHAPTER VI

THREATENING ESTCOURT

Estcourt, November 17, 1899

THERE is a trite proverb about the pitcher that goes to the well. The armoured train has gone forth once too often and too far. Unattended, unaided by cavalry, patrols, or guns, it has been battered by the enemy, and in part captured, and soldiers and civilians have been made prisoners. I confess I never saw anything but risk in going by the train, unless the utmost prudence was exercised. On the occasions when I journeyed therein, Captain Hensley, of the Dublin Fusiliers, who was in charge usually, was wont to stop the train, dismount, and proceed with one or two men on foot to scout the more dangerous overlooking hills, before steaming beyond them. As a matter of fact, also, when Colenso was barred against us by the crossing of the enemy's commandoes to his side, bringing guns with them, there was no particular object to be gained in running down-grade north of Frere. Nay, hard as it may seem to say so, I will add, in

the interests of faithful record, that the verbal and well-understood headquarters instructions were that the train should not be run beyond Frere, unless upon some express orders or for some special cause. Last Wednesday the train was run as far as Chieveley, about six miles north of Frere, and on returning was fired upon, overturned, and most of its living freight were made prisoners by a large body of Boers. But every story in its place in these rough, day-by-day jottings.

Those who slept with their boots off last Monday night were not disturbed save by the chill, damp, unseasonable weather. The wind blowing over the snow-clad Drakensberg Mountains swept chill under tents and blankets. Rain and mist, rivalling anything to be experienced north of the Grampians, had settled upon the land, obscuring hill and vale. It was cruel to be kind, for under these influences black and ordinarily bare red and brown wastes were being converted into green, succulent pastures. Later, morning gave a breathing space of less moisture-laden atmosphere, but the afternoon and night of Tuesday fully restored the watery balance against us. That was discomfort enough, surely. Bang! bang! in the forenoon went the alarm guns upon the west of the railway, a signal that the enemy were approaching. In a minute all was rush and scurry, the soldiers running to seize their arms, and the transport men and coolies to their posts, yoking teams and getting ready ammunition mules, water-

carts, dhoolies, and stretchers. Colonel Martyn had gone out with his mounted men to the east of Frere, and the picquets upon the hills had reported having seen small bodies of Boers. Tents were struck, and everything was quickly prepared for defence.

As the pleasant umbrageous village, but thoroughly South African town of Estcourt, lies in the rolling hollows by the Bushman's River, the troops had to be sent out—some to the left, front, and right, to secure the loftier, down-like sweeps. Those to the east were over a mile away. The higher rough hills were still farther afield, but the smallness of Colonel Long's force forbade extending his lines so far. As Major-General Hildyard had returned to Maritzburg, Colonel Long, R.A., was Brigadier and Commandant. Behind Estcourt is a moderately elevated ridge, midway up which stands Fort Durnford, known in connection with the Zulu War. It is an enclosure rather than a fort, with two rough stone buildings, and the place is now used as a police barracks and jail. There it was determined that if hard pressed the troops should retire and cover the railway and road bridges to the south as long as possible.

I rode out to the east of Estcourt, and from the high ground saw, but 2500 yards away, a party of about 100 Boers upon Mount Bombomvula. They could be noticed surveying the ground in every direction, as if selecting a position. Some rode along the flat top of the hill, others came down its side, and entered the farm buildings of Mr.

Hodson. Our cavalry exchanged a few shots with them during the forenoon and afternoon. The troopers turned the hill, and the Boers upon Bombomvula having galloped off, and the others showing no signs of coming on, the majority of the infantry were withdrawn to their camps. Strong outposts, however, were left to guard the position, and these settled to duty, drenched and cold in the pouring rain, keeping watch and ward for us without a murmur—nay, I think, rather pleased that their posts enabled them to have the first chances of getting in a few shots in the expected battle. But the troops —the Dublin Fusiliers, the Durham Light Infantry, and others who had returned to camp—were no better off than their comrades upon the hills. In the rain and mire they had to hang about, for their tents had been struck. There was, however, an order that tents should be repitched, but they were scarcely up before it was rescinded; and through a terrible day and night, as best they could, the men had to wait for dawn and better weather. Yet all this was in a town where there were many deserted sheds, warehouses, and private dwellings, enough and to spare to afford shelter to all the men. No other army that I can think of at the moment would, in time of war, have been left locked out from available billeting places. Ultimately many of their commanders saw to it that their men found some cover under the railway sheds and the verandahs along the main thoroughfare.

GETTING INTO THE ARMOURED TRAIN AT ESTCOURT.

The event of the week has been the attack upon the armoured train. On Wednesday morning it was ordered out at 5 a.m. to proceed carefully from point to point to Frere. Under Captain Haldane, of the Gordon Highlanders, who for the time was attached to the Dublin Fusiliers, seventy-two non-commissioned officers and men of that battalion, with Lieutenant Frankland, forty-five non-commissioned officers and men of the Durban Light Infantry, under Captain Wylie and Lieutenant Alexander, and five bluejackets from her Majesty's ship *Tartar*, under a petty officer, manned the train. Besides these were the engine hands and seven platelayers to repair damages. Mr. Winston Churchill, of the *Morning Post*, also rode upon the train. Correspondents were wont to proceed in rotation upon the trips, but that morning others whose turn it was, either too sleepy or indifferent, did not embark. A Scotch or Glasgow telegraphist in the Natal Government employ also accompanied the troops, so as to wire back any information either from the stations or by hitching on to the telegraph lines *en route*. The train stopped for a few minutes at Ennersdale, the first station, and about seven miles north. From there a message was sent back that the line was clear, and, receiving authority, the train proceeded onward to Frere, the next station. There another brief stoppage was made, and the police patrol, being interrogated, stated that they had seen no Boers, although it was

known that a few of the enemy had occupied a farm but four miles off the previous night. A wire was sent in to headquarters from Frere that all was clear, and, without waiting for any reply, the train ran on to Chieveley. On the way several natives tried to warn the train back. At Chieveley Station about 300 Boers were seen upon both sides of the line, but some distance away, riding furiously towards Frere, as if to intercept the return of the train. It consisted of, in front, an open flat truck, upon which was a 7-pounder manned by the bluejackets. Next it was an armoured truck with some of the Dublins. Behind that was the engine and tender, and again came two armoured trucks and an open flat truck with railway plant. In the rear armoured trucks were a few of the Dublins, the Durbans, and the railway staff.

Three miles nearer Frere, rounding a curve, and under the slope of a hill, the Boers poured volleys at the train, and at the same moment a repeating 3-pounder Maxim-Nordenfeldt cannon began blazing at them. Two similar guns also opened fire on the devoted train. Suddenly, in a moment, and without warning, as the train was steaming rapidly back—it is a single line—a point was reached where the Boers had removed the fish-plates and propped up one side of the lines with stones. Instantly the flat rear truck—then in front, as the engine was backing—jumped the metals, followed by the next two trucks. They

ran, bumping, for a little distance; then the flat truck and the armoured truck next turned over, throwing all the occupants into the field. The flat truck turned over, wheels uppermost, whilst the top-heavy armoured carriage almost turned a complete somersault. Luckily the engine and tender and the other trucks kept the metals. A platelayer was killed outright, being pinned under the waggon; but most of the others miraculously escaped with a shaking and slight bruises. Then it was that the Boers began firing shells and bullets, faster than ever, at those struggling upon the ground, striving to free themselves from the wreckage. With magnificent intrepidity, although being shot at from three sides, the Dublins and Volunteers began returning the enemy's fire, taking what little shelter they could alongside the line. Mr. Winston Churchill and Lieutenant Frankland clambered out of the truck next the gun, and, proceeding to the derailed waggons, called for volunteers to assist in clearing the line. A score of willing hands responded, Captain Wylie and others of the Durban Light Infantry assisting. Amid a hail of bullets and bursting 3-pounders the flat truck was tilted over, and a few men released. Then they tried to push away the armoured truck, but it was too heavy for their united efforts. Churchill and the others encouraged the men, rallying them again and again.

Meanwhile the Dublins, Durbans, and a few others were pouring volleys into the almost unseen

Boers hidden behind the rocks, about 1000 yards away. Independent firing was also being kept up at them, and the bluejackets, bravely commanded by their petty officer—who was the incarnation of coolness—got their 7-pounder into action. They sent two, if not three, well-aimed shells at the Boers, several hundred of whom lined the hills. But just then a shot from the enemy's 3-pounder or field-gun hit the small naval 7-pounder, knocked gun and carriage on to the veldt, and wounded several of the seamen. But the men were not a whit beaten. Sergeant E. Basset, of the Dublins, standing up, shouted his orders to the men, giving them the direction and ranges in the coolest manner. Nearly everybody had clambered out of the armoured trucks, which were being pelted with the enemy's shells. The "character" of the Dublins, Private Kavanagh—that day one of the stretcher-bearers—chaffed and encouraged his comrades, telling them the Boer shells could hit nothing. He it was who at Dundee, after the long day's battle, being asked if he was hungry and did not wish for something to eat, said, "No. How can I with my mouth full?" "Full!" said his officer—"what do you mean?" "Why, my heart's been in it all day, sir!" replied Kavanagh, with a grin. And so the "hard case" of his battalion shouted and joked, walked about amid a tempest of bullets, and stirred the gallant, glorious Dublins to shoot well and thrue.

The trucks could not be man-handled, so engine-driver Wegner and his mates uncoupled the waggons that had been in front, ran them down the line a little way, and commenced to butt and smash a road through the overturned waggons. By dint of pulling back with chains and smashing forward, the engine and tender won past the wreckage. Then they tried to return and pick up the other two waggons, the armoured and flat truck, but they were baulked by one of the others having swung round across the line, and finding the coupling-chains smashed. Captain Wylie, who had been shot through the leg early in the action, got Sergeant Tod, of the Durbans, to place some stones to protect his head as he lay upon the ground. Scarcely had Tod done so and turned to help the other wounded, when a shell knocked Captain Wylie's little parapet away, and Tod was himself thrown up by a kick from a piece of the projectile which hit him severely. All the wounded, with the help and direction of Churchill, were placed upon the tender. Meanwhile the engine was struck in several places by shells. The feed-injector was broken. A shell passed through a corner of the tender, killing one of the wounded men and maiming others as they lay prone upon the coal-sacks, whilst another missile struck the smoke-box, and missed penetrating the boiler by the merest shave, but it started a leak or two. Wegner, the driver, was hit and stunned by a piece of shell.

Then, there being no more to be done, the engine and tender, with its freight of fully a score wounded and well—there were a dozen injured—steamed on to Ennersdale and then to Frere to summon assistance.

Those left behind spread out along the line were still blazing away at the Boers, fighting as a forlorn hope, whilst the train drew off. Several of the Durbans and Dublins followed it a little way on foot, shooting at the enemy as they slowly retired. At Frere it was found that the station hands and police had gone and taken the telegraph instruments with them. Those McArthur took out with him had been broken in the action, and, there being no other way out of it, with their mangled freight of dead and wounded, engine and tender steamed back into Estcourt. Mr. Churchill, however, after handing in his revolver and field-glasses, said he was going back to the scene to assist the wounded and stand by the men. The last seen of him was as he trudged alone away down into the arena of battle, where the shot and shell were still screaming, splintering rock and ploughing the ground. A few of the luckier fugitives passed him on the way, but failed to turn him back from his purpose. A small body of Mounted Volunteers, who rode out from Estcourt and Frere, got upon the right flank of the Boers, and inflicted some loss upon the enemy before they were compelled to retire before superior numbers.

The news of the disaster to the train caused

a shock to the little garrison, all of whom were anxious to be led out to their comrades' rescue. But it could not be; larger interests held the commander's hands, no doubt, and the firing which we had all heard went on for some little time longer, and then ceased. Subsequently an ambulance train was sent out, under Surgeon-Captain Briscoe, to bring in the wounded. The Boers met him, but declined to give any information or return a man until General Joubert had been communicated with. The officer was told to return next day, when an answer would be given him. He did so, taking as before medicines and stretchers with him; but the answer was that the wounded and prisoners would be sent to Pretoria. Incidentally, Surgeon-Captain Briscoe learned that, according to the Boers, three of our men had been killed and twelve wounded. That does not include those killed and wounded brought in by the engine and tender. The exact number missing are—Dublin Fusiliers, two officers (Captain Haldane and Lieutenant Falkland) and forty-five non-commissioned officers and men; Durban Light Infantry, twenty-four non-commissioned officers and men missing. During the afternoon and evening several of the men straggled back, including a platelayer or two. There are four platelayers missing, and Mr. Winston Churchill, about whom the Boers would give no information beyond saying that the list and report of the affair would appear in the Pretoria newspapers.

In periods of great excitement small matters become lost to the recollection. Of those I interrogated very few agreed as to various details of the disaster. The telegraphist, Mr. R. T. McArthur, furnished, perhaps, the clearest and most succinct account. He said:—

"We left Estcourt at 5.30 a.m., and ran on to Ennersdale, and reported by wire, 'All clear.' Shortly before reaching Frere we met and spoke to some of the Natal Police, who had been bivouacking upon the kopjes. They told us the Boers had all gone back the previous night. Then we went to Frere, where we wired the General, 'All well,' and without waiting for a reply ran on to Chieveley. Shortly before entering that station we saw fifty Boers going west at a canter with some waggons, as we thought. We waited a few minutes at Chieveley, and then started back. About three miles out, or two miles north of Frere, we noticed several hundred Boers about 800 yards off, on the west side. Then we saw more on the east of the line. They began firing at us, first with rifles and then with Maxim-Nordenfeldt cannon. One of their shots made a big dent in the rear armoured truck, but did not enter. Their guns were behind the kopje; at least, two repeating cannon, which shot a steady flame, and a heavier piece that threw shrapnel at us. But a few yards on our rear, then, the front truck ran off the line, shaking and jolting terribly, and ours, the next or armoured one,

followed suit, and soon all three left the rails. The next thing I knew we were all upset, and, strangely, only one man was killed. We all scrambled out. Sitting down, the soldiers began firing volleys at the Boers, who responded by peppering us with more shot and shell. In about five minutes Mr. Churchill came from what had been the front of the train, took charge, and asked for volunteers to shift the trucks. About fifteen men helped to do so, but the waggons were too heavy to move. Then the engine managed to smash through, breaking them up, and getting knocked about in doing so. All this was done under heavy fire. We tried to couple up the trucks that had been in front, but could not, the line being blocked. Then, picking up all the wounded we could see, we started for Frere to get assistance. My instruments were smashed, and we found those at Frere had been carried off by the police for safe keeping. From there we pushed ahead to Ennersdale, whence I wired to the General, giving him a few details. We had several men shot down whilst we were putting the wounded on the tender, although our troops did their best to cover the operation by firing volleys. Several of the shells struck the telegraph wires and poles, cutting and knocking down the line."

Wednesday was a sad, weary night in Estcourt. The rain fell continually, and the troops were soaked and covered with mud. An order was

issued for the women and children to leave the town, and there were preparations made for the troops to retire upon Mooi River. Finally sterner and wiser counsels prevailed, and a rallying position was chosen, as I have said, upon Fort Durnford, or the kopje that stands over it, and which commands the railway station and bridges. Next day (Thursday) we heard the Boers were coming on; but they, perhaps, like ourselves, were busy trying to dry their clothes and other belongings, for the day turned out, in its earlier part, light and warm. Happily, too, further reinforcements arrived in the shape of two battalions, and more were hourly expected. To-day (Friday) we learn still that the Boers are but six miles away, and mean surely to attack us to-morrow. If their numbers are as stated, it is to be hoped they may. One of the events of the morning was the capture of two Boers by two Mounted Police: Sergeant Fisher and Trooper Sullivan. The constables had been out scouting near Gornton, about twelve miles off, when they saw a party of forty Boers riding to intercept them. They descended to the road, and made for Estcourt. Before them appeared two Boers, riding leisurely in the same direction, with their rifles slung over their backs. Ere the Boers could unsling their Mausers the policemen's revolvers were at their heads, and both burghers promptly surrendered. Taking possession of their enemies' Mausers, the police drove their captives at the gallop

towards this place. For four miles they were pursued and heavily fired upon by the party that tried to trap them, but Fisher and Sullivan continued to bring in their prisoners. The latest incident, as I write, is the arrival of two Kaffir messengers sent from Ladysmith yesterday by the military. Both bring official news. The garrison is all right, and the troops continue to inflict much punishment upon the enemy. Each day there is an artillery duel going forward, and occasionally infantry firing, in which, of late, Sir George White's force has had much the best of the game. By way of finale, is it not a little odd that the War Office has forgotten to provide the officers with a supply of military maps of Natal? It so happens at the moment that even colonels are unable to procure trustworthy maps, either military or ordinary, for the good reason that there are none left on stock anywhere.

CHAPTER VII

SOME UNPLEASANT TRUTHS

Estcourt, November 21, 1899

With the enemy at the gates, criticism seems almost out of place. But, as a people, we are so much the stronger that, if we prove true to ourselves, the result will justify the assumption of our task to rectify the wrongs of fellow-countrymen living within the borders of the Empire. It is necessary to speak out. There is much that should be plainly told, unless it is permissible knowingly to keep silent and let things drift from bad to worse. As you are aware, there is an active censorship of Press telegrams. Yet England is a long way off and messages travel slowly. Now it is again sought to establish a censorship over letters to the Press. How that is going to serve the narrow purpose of certain of the military in these days of ready publication in print, unless it is supplemented by an inspection and censorship of all private correspondence, it is difficult to comprehend. They will have to open and deal with such supposititious

Little Tug
River

Chapman & Hall Ltd. London.

Vincent Brooks, Day & Son Lith.

letters as this: "My own dear Mother—We have had a rare treat and doing. You know the —— battalion; it is fairly rotten, and one or two of the batteries are no better. It happened this way—" And so on. Perhaps the best means to adopt to prevent all possibility of the circulation of matter by newspapers, calculated to assist the enemy, would be to establish the censorship in London and abolish it abroad. I am naturally only dealing with home publication, which alone concerns me at the moment. Other interests, other methods. A London censorship at least would ensure that people at home would not be misinformed, or kept too much and too long in the dark respecting the actual progress of their war. Besides, there would be the further advantage that it would free the minds and hands of officers upon active service from much uncongenial and thankless labour, and enable them to devote their energies and abilities to more important military duties. The question of what should or should not be made public could then be amicably discussed by editors and the War Office authorities, far from the scene of operations. I take it that, somehow, under such conditions, things that should be known at home would get talked about, if only privately.

I have written about the total lack of reliable maps of Natal. There are very few copies of any kind yet in the hands of our officers, and most of the correspondents are in the same plight, although

I have been more fortunate in that respect. There are colonels and majors, not to speak of those of lower rank, who do not possess a useful map of this colony. It reminds one of the almost similar incident in the Franco-German War, when our worthy Gallic neighbours had reams of maps of German territory, but none of their own country. Let us now record the laugh against ourselves, with this item thrown in, that the Intelligence Department of the War Office have been making a special study of South Africa and its affairs for quite fifteen years.

Somehow the quality and quantity of the Boer artillery had come to be overlooked apparently, for its excellence, so far as accurate shooting and the hardihood of their gunners are concerned, has been one, among others, of the surprises of the war. Whilst we have shown all our old conservative fidelity to ancient models, or slight modifications of them, the Boers have boldly acquired the newest and latest types of cannon and machine guns. The wondrous rapidity with which they have moved their cannon, whether long-range or quick-firing, from place to place in this difficult country, dragging their artillery to the summit of what look like almost inaccessible hilltops, is an object-lesson of what can be done by hardy and intelligent fighters. The only thing on our side, so far, that has in any way matched the Boers' handling of their guns, has been accomplished by the bluejackets of Her Majesty's

ships *Powerful* and *Tartar*. As for the crew of Her Majesty's ship *Tartar*, under Lieutenant James, R.N., they have, by means of oxen, dragged their two heavy long-range ship's 12-pounders from place to place for the defence of Estcourt. Up and down hill they have gone, repeatedly constructing new works and shelling the enemy ungrudgingly whenever occasion offered. Yet, confessedly, the range of the Boer Creusot 12-pounder or 9-centimètre gun is several thousand yards greater than theirs. Can it be that our cordite is inferior in ballistic qualities to the granulated Continental types of smokeless powder?

And if I were asked to indicate what I thought were the conspicuously weak features, so far disclosed in the conduct of the campaign in Natal, I would aver that they were indecision and want of mobility when the troops take the field. The former of these defects may be assumed to be eradicable, the latter a somewhat confirmed and almost constitutional British army malady. But either view is a too hasty generalization. In practice, I fear, it is likely to be found more difficult to cure a habit of hesitancy in certain leaders—who, when troops are deliberately sent to engage, yet delay to "strike home"—than by marching rapidly to move our soldiers over wide stretches of country. As in Indian frontier fighting, the baggage must be cut down to the lowest living limits, and carried like the ammunition, upon pack

mules. That may mean that our men, like the Boers, may have to travel and go into action in practically little more than what they stand up in. In that way even the British Tommy could manage to get near enough his enemy to teach them that dragging cannon and looting cattle is an unprofitable game, not to be conducted without risk and hard knocks. But, better than all, would be what has been foreseen and preached upon for years—a vast increase in the number of our mounted infantry. Were we to pay our troopers five shillings a day, an amount many of the Colonial horsemen receive, what an incomparable army of mounted men Britain could place in the field!

Whether at Dundee, Ladysmith, Estcourt, or elsewhere, to the seaboard and Durban, there has been a worrying, too frequent change of plans, by no means all of which were rendered necessary by the enemy's movement and surprises. When I recall Dundee, I must emphasise that neither I nor any one else has done anything but tardy justice to Colonel Dartnell, of the Natal Police. That splendid veteran was the genius and real planner and guide, as Major-General Yule himself has often declared, of the retirement from Glencoe. In the battle he was as good as a brigade, and in the retreat he was indefatigable in securing the safe arrival of the column in Ladysmith. But to the question of indecision. Work done yesterday or to-day has too often been ordered to be undone in

the course of the next few hours. Men have been marched out early and late, in all weathers, to give battle, and, after being kept upon the ground, marched back to camp without being allowed to fire a shot. As with the infantry, so it has been with the artillery. There have been occasions when such procedure was wise and unavoidable, but in the majority of instances reliable intelligence and thorough scouting would have saved many harassing marches and wretched bivouacs. Nay, for want of a little prescience on the part of one or two battalion commanders, their men have lain out overnight upon the hillsides, chilled and soaked to the skin, without blankets, overcoats, food, or cheering tea. And their camp was but a few miles away, and there was no enemy interposing to threaten the safety of supply waggons or coffee kettles.

The War Office, apparently, is not always exacting enough to require that the standard of efficiency in every battalion shall be of the highest grade, or to insist upon the direct personal responsibility of the commanding officers. In two weeks one mounted Volunteer force has had its camp changed fifteen times! Nay, there are instances where linesmen's tents have been ordered, struck, packed, unpacked, repitched, struck, and so on again—twice, yea! thrice, within twenty-four hours. As to our acquired immobility. It appears that each infantry battalion requires nine waggons,

capable of carrying 4000 lbs. apiece. Nor is that all that is set apart for the transport of their stores and equipment. There are, besides these, two Scotch carts, one water-cart, and two ammunition carts. A tolerably long train these make, and, as they are set down authoritatively as indispensable, our armies don't move until they get them. Except—except when circumstances alter cases. It is for the want of transport, more than all else, that the operations of commanders are said to have been sadly hampered, plans abandoned, and successes in battle minimized or lost. But to that should be added the Boer white-flag dodge, as at the first battle of Dundee, when, under the then Colonel Yule's direct orders, the officers of two of our field batteries and three Maxims ranged in line saw with mortification the enemy fleeing across the front of their guns, and but 500 yards off; and they were precluded from firing a single shot to check the flight.

The waggons enumerated, for which instead of nine drawn by mules may be substituted six waggons drawn by oxen, do not include the artillery train and other transport. If the railway transport fail us, or if it is allowed to fail us, then in this season of heavy thunderstorms, swollen streams, and bad roads, the hauling by waggons will become a serious impediment to the mobility of the troops. The chief business of a soldier is to fight, and he must somehow be got to the scene of operations and

made use of, in sharp and decisive actions. Our soldiers, I emphatically repeat, are eager and capable of settling the issue, but they are beginning to share the widening Colonial belief that there is too much delay in forcing conclusions with the active and wily Boers. It is to be regretted that the real character of the task set the troops was not better understood by the home authorities. There has been a deal of penny wise and pound foolishness in this very matter of over-the-sea transport, and the use of mounted troops. A week won by the employment of the best ocean steamships would have meant millions sterling saved to the Colonists, besides tending to shorten the duration of the war. It is an unpleasant reflection to think that to-day so many thousands of splendid British troops are shut up under Sir George White in Ladysmith by an undisciplined army of Boers, mere farmers, who do not greatly outnumber the soldiers. And, in all likelihood, something of the same sort may now happen any day at Estcourt. This is, indeed, menacing the head of the relief column and delaying its start.

To the Natalians, who wish to fight the Boers on every conceivable occasion, the outlook is depressing. And I agree with them thus far, that vigorous measures should be taken in order to put a stop to the free running and raiding of the Boers in this Colony. There is a large native population, and a not inconsiderable number of

Boer settlers in South Africa, and the moral effect of the enemy's doings in Natal upon them must not be left out of consideration, even by the military. There is a call for younger and more vigorous leaders, but I have yet to learn that age is a barrier to the exercise of the greatest military qualities—dogged resolution and swiftness in dealing with an enemy. I am more than sanguine that once General Sir Redvers Buller is enabled to move forward, he will quickly put an end to the existing deplorable situation. He is a stern, fighting soldier, as well as an experienced and masterly leader of troops, who will stand no nonsense nor brook incapables. With him in the field the Boers' long innings will be finally closed.

Too much latitude has already been conceded to the Boers because of their great mobility and supposed high shooting qualities with the rifle. Tommy can, as I have repeatedly explained, now hold his own with that weapon, and whenever our soldiers get near enough the enemy to use the bayonet, the Boer on every occasion incontinently bolts. It is their guns and gunners who have really astounded everybody. They select good positions, move their cannon very smartly, fight hard, and aim with rare accuracy. Happily, the bursting qualities of their missiles are quite at fault. On the whole, of late the Boer artillerymen have shown themselves quite as good, and even better than some of our batteries, which we were all honestly wont to consider without flaw

and the best in the world. These be unpleasant truths, but all the more need that they be turned to account by our artillerists.

It is surely matter for regret, and more particularly at this juncture, that General French's proposal to cut his way out of Ladysmith with most of the cavalry and a battery was not accepted. An it had been, the animals would not have been, figuratively, eating their heads off in a besieged town. The lessons of the Franco-German War taught that much. And, if they had been out, General Clery would have had a mounted force strong enough to have dispersed or cornered raiding Boer commandoes. Let this be said of the Boer, he is an astute, courageous foe, who has in some measure taken time by the forelock. True, he has also had great chances which he has quite missed taking advantage of. Once the war is ended by the restoration of British supremacy, I confidently predict that he will settle soberly down, returning to his farm and giving little or no further trouble to govern. He will, with his native quietude, accept the changed order of things the moment that he is made to realize the "rooineks" are quite his equals in courage and obstinacy, and are disposed to rule justly, without fear or favour.

As at Ladysmith, so at Estcourt, the means to ensure the safety of the place arrived not a moment too soon. The rule, without an exception, has been to delay things essential as long as possible. Take

the cases of commissariat and ordnance supplies, some of which are by no means over ample at Estcourt. Ten days or more were wasted in cross-writing between here and Maritzburg for information why "such and such" were required, and what had been done with "such and such" things. Upon Major-General Hildyard returning hither, he instantly set about inspecting the outposts and acquiring a thorough knowledge of the surrounding country. He approved Colonel Long's plan of occupying the high ridge to the south-west of the town, which commands the railway and bridges over the Bushman's River, and turning the plateau and crests into a fortified camp. Our lines are long, but strong, more so than those of Ladysmith.

Small bodies of Boers had been seen in various directions; but it was not until last Saturday (November 18) they evinced any serious intention of coming to close quarters with the troops at Estcourt. Patrols reported that they had destroyed part of the line near Frere, and looted that place, as well as Ennersdale, but six miles distant. They were said to be part of some commando 1000 strong, or thereabouts, making down the Weenen Road, whilst a co-operating raiding Orange Free State commando, under Grobeler, was proceeding by the west side of Estcourt. Then news was signalled in from the outlying picquets that the Boers were advancing in force with several guns. At 9.30 a.m. the "assembly" was sounded, tents were struck

in a twinkling, the camps disappeared, and the baggage was smartly packed. Meanwhile, most of the men had been paraded in marching order, and detachments been sent to strengthen the outposts. The main bodies were disposed to render prompt assistance upon the north, east, or west sides of the town. To keep open communications with Mooi River the West Yorks, under Colonel Kitchener, were stationed at Willow Grange, about six miles nearer Maritzburg.

Riding forward, there was no difficulty in seeing the Boers and their method of advancing. Lines of scouts in twos, threes, and dozens, were cantering about in a semi-circle extending over five miles in ength. On sturdy, smart ponies they edged forward, quickly but cautiously, getting upon every point from which a view could be obtained, and guardedly eschewing flat and open ground whenever practicable. Their main body got possession of the low, rough hills this side of Ennersdale and to the west of the railway. Their right was strongest, so as to keep a tight grip upon the hilly country stretching up to the Drakensberg. Silhouetted against the skyline, afoot and mounted, they swarmed like bees along the serrated crests of the kopjes. Extending from their left, in strings they made by way of gulleys towards the long, down-like ridge upon the north-east of the town. Half a hundred got upon the northern limit of it, and from a position near Hudson's

Farm, surveyed what was visible, nearly all of Estcourt and our camp. Similar bands came into sight upon the western kopjes, and so infantry went forward to engage them. A few volleys fired at ranges from 900 yards and upward cleared the left, and our mounted police and Volunteers, with some of the Dublin Fusiliers, gave them a taste of their mettle upon the eastern ridges. Only a shot or two was returned by the enemy, who declined to permit our troops to get too close to them, for they fell back as the soldiers advanced. Two or three dismounted Boers who tried to sneak in closer than their comrades, on being seen and saluted with rifle fire, ran off to the rear.

At 10.20 a.m. it looked as if the Boers were, in fulfilment of their promise to the local farmers, really seriously trying to take Estcourt. The naval 12-pounder from the upper camp thereupon opened fire, sending a shell hurtling amongst them. It fell close to a stone wall, three miles out, where a body of Boers were congregated, throwing splinters and stones in all directions. Instantly the enemy scattered with a unanimity and suddenness unique and conspicuous. A few long-range volleys, 2900 yards, delivered from the Dublins' Lee-Metfords, increased their dispersal. By 11 a.m. they had evidently changed their minds, and were drawing off to the eastward and westward. Our Mounted Volunteers — we have only a few Regulars on horseback here—

Mounted Infantry, and footmen moved forward to engage, but the enemy withdrew all along our front and flanks, and so by noon the main bodies returned to camp and dinner, only the outposts' supports being left out. There was no loss upon our side, but natives reported that several of the enemy had been killed and wounded, and amongst the trophies of war secured were a runaway Boer horse or two. We learned that the Boer commandoes had six small cannon, including a 7-pounder or two, and several Hotchkiss 3-pounder machine guns, besides one or two 9-centimètre French cannon. The Boers continued raiding and looting, and left us in peace for the rest of the day.

Sunday, November 19, being in South Africa, as in Scotland, the "Sabbath," the Boers presumably were at church or holding conventicles, and enjoying, in their own peculiar way, psalmody and sermons. So, barring the prodigious hourly crop of camp and Kaffir-runner rumours and yarns, we were comparatively undisturbed. There was, however, no Sabbatarian pharisaism at Ladysmith, for we could hear the cannon pounding away there as usual. As the day wore on the Sabbath became apparently spent, and small bands of the enemy resumed looting and cattle-lifting. Reports came in that commandoes were moving in various directions towards Ulundi (west of Estcourt) and Hlatikulu, where they had camps and laager for cattle, as well as towards Mooi River, Highlands, and

Willow Grange. About sunset a few section volleys were fired by the West Yorks and the Queen's (West Surrey), who were guarding the railway at Willow Grange, at a handful of raiders, who retreated. It was said that the enemy upon the ridges near Highlands had guns, and that Joubert was either with them or on his way down to join them. The avowed intention of the Boer leader and his men was to capture Estcourt, Mooi River, and Maritzburg, and so destroy all possibility of despatching a relief column to Sir George White's assistance.

But from Ladysmith news was brought the same evening that all was well, and they wished to open heliographic communication to co-operate with the expected relieving forces under General Clery. We were warned also that Estcourt was to be attacked. Our excellent Volunteer Cavalry, consisting of detachments of the Imperial Light Horse, Border Mounted Rifles, Natal Carbineers, a few police, with Bethune's Horse, the King's Royal Rifles Company of the Mounted Infantry, and two Natal 7-pounder field-guns, caught sight of a commando near Highlands. There was a prompt but brief interchange of shots, both parties retiring towards dusk. That same evening Colonel Kitchener ordered the evacuation of Willow Grange, so the West Yorks and Queen's came into Estcourt. Their arrival was a surprise and disappointment, for no one credited the rumours that the railway line had been cut by the enemy. The alarm

caused led to the cessation of train traffic for many hours.

On Monday, November 20, fugitive farmers and storekeepers reported that there were Transvaalers with the Free Staters moving along south upon the west. The oft-discussed question whether Estcourt should be evacuated or defended was decided finally by General Hildyard in favour of holding on. We heard that the enemy had raided 12,000 cattle, which, at £15 a head, will mean a tidy bill for compensation by-and-by. Another frequently debated subject, the advisability of enrolling all the local loyal farmers as scouts, or mounted Volunteers, was recommended by the General to the authorities. With their thorough knowledge of the topography of the district their services, as had been often pointed out, would be invaluable. From Ladysmith emerged the further news that General White's troops had inflicted considerable punishment upon the enemy whilst repulsing the assault made upon the town on the 8th and 9th inst. It was stated that the number of prisoners held, and the food supplies, were becoming matter for serious consideration. There was an absurd story tacked on, that Sir George White had warned General Joubert that if bombarding buildings occupied by non-combatants was continued he would place the prisoners in some of these houses. In the evening General Hildyard sent out a small body of troops to hold Willow Grange Station, the railway being still intact.

A very early start was made on Tuesday, November 21, in order to locate and try to carry the camp of the Boer commandoes advancing towards Highlands, by the east of Estcourt. By 3 a.m. I was on the road to Willow Grange, where I arrived within the next hour. There I found five companies of the Border Regiment, three companies of the East Surrey, one company of the Queen's, with two Natal 7-pounders, detachments of the Border Mounted Infantry, Imperial Light Horse, the Border Mounted Rifles, the Natal Carbineers and some of the King's Royal Rifles Mounted Infantry. Colonel Hinde, of the Border Regiment, commanded the force until the arrival of General Hildyard and Staff, and Colonel Martyn the mounted troops, who are fully as active and daring as the best Boer riders. Their bivouac had been cheerless, and the train from Estcourt with provisions being late in arriving, breakfast was delayed. However, before the morning had quite gone, the troops marched off along the main road towards Highlands. The troopers soon located the enemy, who were seen to be holding two long stony ridges four miles to the east of the roadway between Willow Grange and Mooi River. They were, so to speak, in the apex of a triangle. Mounting upon a rocky crest, about 3000 yards from their position, General Hildyard saw the Boer camp. The enemy evidently were confident that the long crests they held were safe from immediate

capture, for their horses were grazing about, knee-haltered, as is the custom of the country, and culinary preparations were proceeding apace. They watched us nonchalantly in return, and despatched two or three scouts to make closer inspection, but the latter were persuaded to keep their distance. From either end the position could have been assailed and carried with relatively little loss had we possessed a field battery. About noon, it having been decided not to attack, the infantry, who had toiled out seven miles in the glare of the sun, were marched back to Willow Grange. The cavalry then moved about on their own account, and a portion of them, under Colonel Martyn, rode down towards Highlands Railway Station. Near there, late in the afternoon, they saw a very large Boer commando, with six guns, moving down from the west. A few shots were exchanged, and then, in danger of being caught betwixt two forces, the troopers retired. That same night all the troops at Willow Grange were ordered into Estcourt, where they arrived at a late hour.

During the afternoon and night one of the periodic, fierce thunderstorms, blown from the Drakensberg, burst upon us. It was accompanied by big hailstones and a deluge of rain. The Natalian hailstones are no mere marbles in size, but frequently range from the bulk of a pigeon's to a hen's egg. They come with a pelt, like a cobblestone in an Irish riot, and drive horses

almost frantic. Need I add that they often pierce the universal corrugated iron roofs of Colonial buildings, and kill cattle in the fields. Whether it was the thunderstorm or the Boers, the telegraphic communication with Mooi River and the outer world was broken at 3.30 p.m. That same evening the last train from the south arrived at Estcourt, and reported the enemy closing in upon the railway. Later on we learned that it had been cut, and so we in Estcourt, in turn with Ladysmith, were being hemmed in and invested by the Boers. True, possible speedy relief from the other brigades, and batteries remaining at Mooi River and the capital, could be afforded if General Clery so willed it. But we all knew that it was part of his plan thoroughly to mobilize his whole available strength before advancing, either to our help or upon Ladysmith. So we were in for an investment, brief or protracted, and stock had to be taken of our means of resistance.

The position is extended, but naturally far preferable to Ladysmith. With five good Regular Infantry battalions, sundry Colonial Volunteer forces, foot and mounted, two naval guns and a detachment of bluejackets, a 7-pounder Natal battery, and No. 7 Field Battery, R.A., besides various other details, there was little doubt but that we could hold our ground. Under the careful eye of General Hildyard no reasonable precautions for ensuring the security of the place

were overlooked. Nor has it been omitted to maintain communications by runners both with Ladysmith and Mooi River. Unfortunately, whilst the hills to the north hide us from Ladysmith, so do the Highland ranges prevent us from seeing and helioing to Mooi River.

CHAPTER VIII

INVESTED ESTCOURT

Estcourt, Friday, November 24, 1899

ESTCOURT awoke last Wednesday to the consciousness that it was invested. No trains, no newspapers, no mails, no telegraphic communication, made it evident that something worse than an omnibus or cab-strike had occurred. Uneasy groups of townsfolk, with refugee farmers, discussed the question of the proximity and intentions of the Boers, and what would happen within the next half-hour or so. They were so engrossed that, for an appreciable interval—a quarter of an hour, less or more—the vital issue of breakfasting was neglected. He who doubted that the enemy was in evidence was bidden mount the nearest vantage-ground and satisfy himself by a look at the Boers, who were creeping about like ants along the adjacent ridges. Speculation as to their numbers was fearsomely elastic, stretching to almost the whole male population of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. The military were busy, thinking only of work,

medals, and honours, counting horses and stores, and debating ways and means of defence. Colonists and Uitlanders enjoyed a wider range of topics. Besides Boer and British plans, they talked about the wicked crassness of the Imperial and local Governments for having neglected their invaluable counsel for ages, and for failing to make full preparations for these inevitable evil days. But, ah! their rulers were to be commiserated, for none of them possessed the personal and intimate knowledge of Colonials of the low trickiness of the Boers. Natalian hearths and homes had been pillaged, and herds looted; but a day of reckoning would assuredly come, despite the transitory successes of the enemy. What was needed was not more soldiers, but fighting officers, who would risk losing any number of men. "Chaps like the leaders of their own Volunteers," etc. Chaffing aside, Majors McKenzie, Bethune, and others of them, have given abundant proofs of being amongst the bravest of the brave. Such were the opinions of the men in the streets, and, like most slop-made views, of little real value. That the situation involved the consideration of other and larger issues never recurred to them, nor that it might be the wisest plan not to harass or drive the enemy away from Mooi River or Estcourt until General Clery had completed all his preparations for the advance. Certainly that view did not approve itself to their minds. Neither did the bigger interests of the

Ladysmith garrison strongly appeal to their imaginations as compared with their own particular environment.

The air was still on Wednesday morning, and the day gave promise of being of tropical sultriness. Heaped masses of clouds hung near the Drakensberg, seemingly as solid as those precipitous walled mountains. There was in their vaporous form and darkness presage of further fearful thunderstorms. We could hear the deep thud, thudding of the big guns pulsating over the hills from Ladysmith. Further fighting was surely in progress there. Major-General Hildyard, having ascertained that the Boers under Joubert were but eight miles from Estcourt, called a council of war, whereat it was decided to go out and attack the enemy. A night assault was held to be the surest way of dealing effectively with the Boers and capturing their guns. To get the men within easier reach of the enemy's laager, the troops were marched back in the direction of Willow Grange. Colonel Martyn proceeded in the forenoon with a small body of cavalry to reconnoitre the ground around M'Konghlwani, or Hill of the Mist, a conical mount, also sometimes known as Beacon Hill. Three miles to the westward, holding lofty stony ridges, was the main body of the Boers, 4000 or 5000 strong, and commanded by Joubert in person.

At 3 p.m., with the Volunteer cavalry scouting in

front, the troops advanced, accompanied by General Hildyard. The force selected consisted of the Queen's (West Surrey) on the left, and upon the right and centre the West Yorks and East Surrey. There were also the 7th Field Battery Royal Artillery, and one of the 12-pounder naval guns, with a detachment under Lieutenant James, R.N. Moving onward without check, with a thin wide front deployed for action, the men got within a mile of Willow Grange. The manner in which the Boers fight has made it necessary for our troops to adopt the old Peninsular system of tactics—namely, of advancing in aggressive skirmishing lines. Brave and resourceful, the British soldier in those days won deserved laurels for himself, his Generals, and country. Handled in the same way, as he will be hereafter in this country, the enemy will learn he can beat them at their own game.

Widely apart, ten paces separating man from man, in single line, with similar lines following at intervals of from 50 to 150 yards, as the nature of the ground and cover required, forward went our gallant khaki-clad infantry. Hither and thither, a few troopers of the various detachments of Natal Volunteer corps had ridden ahead to peer over kopjes and crests, and make sure that no Boer commandoes were lying hidden to spring ambuscades upon the soldiers. From all I saw, our horsemen—Natalians, and the one body of Regulars, a company of King's Royal Rifles mounted infantry, and the linesmen—

were calmly, impassively confident in themselves and indifferent to the enemy's fire, rifle or cannon. Nay, they absolutely jeered, and made contemptuous remarks, later on, at the way in which the Boer shells plumped into the ground without hurting anybody. Most of the enemy's missiles failed to explode, and even those which burst rarely did more than bespatter the nearest men with mud, or shy stones about our ears. I noted also that the British officer had wisely transmogrified himself; so that it was impossible for the Boers' selected marksmen any longer to distinguish, by outward appearances, even a battalion commander from an ordinary "Tommy." Numbers of the officers also carried rifles—swords and Sam Brown belts being now a thing of the past. Surely so sensible a rule, which circumstances have so suddenly forced the authorities to adopt, and which puts it out of the power of an enemy to tell an officer from a private, unless he gets close enough to inspect the shoulder-straps, will be incorporated in the "Queen's Army Regulations." It is a subject upon which I have hammered, ineffectually, for years.

Behind the scouts, upon the left, marched part of the Queen's, anxious to re-occupy Willow Grange. They held onward until they had secured the low ridges commanding the railway station. To their right, and thrown back so as to face to the westward, were the remainder of the column — the

West Yorks and East Surrey, with the naval-gun detachment. Their immediate objective was, as I have stated, M'Konghlwani, or Mountain of the Mist. Thither, trekked by thirty oxen, guided by Major McKenzie, the big naval 12-pounder was being dragged. Half the ascent had not been gained when the threatened storm burst in wildest fury. The lightning was vivid and incessant, frequently dashing earthward in double zigzag rails of fire. With crash and roar more deafening than the heaviest artillery, the thunder burst and rolled. Rain fell in torrents and sheets. Betwixt recurrent waterspouts there were uncanny, well-nigh murderous hailstorms. The rounded, hardened ice-pellets were larger than ordinary marbles. For over three hours the first of the hailstorms lasted, chunks of ice falling in myriads, in size from a pigeon's to a hen's egg, injuring men and driving the horses nearly frantic. It had been a sombre afternoon, and an unparalleled stormy night was creeping on, made lurid by lightning. Not in forty years, the Colonists declare, has a week of such wild, cyclonic weather been experienced in Natal. The sides of M'Konghlwani were as a cascade, but through all pressed onward the indomitable infantry and the sailors with their gun.

Somebody in one of the battalions fancied he saw Boers, and fired a volley or two. Whether it was the noise of the rifles, the cries of the oxen-drivers, or from information conveyed by their own scouts—

more probably the latter—the enemy commenced firing a long-range gun, a "Long Tom." Their shells were well aimed, falling upon the reverse slope of Beacon Hill. One of them struck the ground but ten feet from the naval gun and limber. No attention, however, was paid to the shell-fire, but drivers and bluejackets, assisted by dismounted troopers, wrestled with the wheels, and bounced them as best they could over the boulders and angular pieces of rock. Many times the gun was in jeopardy, and nearly "took charge" to trundle downhill, but it was blocked and checked always in the nick of time. Once it tumbled completely over, and was only righted with great difficulty by sheer manual strength. When, finally, it was hauled to the top of Beacon Hill, Lieutenant James sent three shells hurtling across to the Boers, 4000 yards away, upon an opposite roof-like range. That sufficed, for the enemy did not return the fire, and peace, save for the elements, was secured for hours.

The troops had marched from Estcourt in the lightest of kits, and many of them had but little food in their haversacks. Cold and wet, without blankets or waterproof sheets, they strove as best they could to pass the weary, dreadful night. Bluejackets, gunners, cavalry, and infantry, when the brief slumber of fatigue and exhaustion had been snatched, had to rise and stamp and shiver to keep their blood in circulation. About 2 a.m. General Hildyard had ordered that the final movement

Drawn by] THE BATTLE OF WILLOW GRANGE, NOVEMBER 23. [*René Bull.*

Doctors operating under difficulties—Ambulances fired upon.

should begin. In the darkness the troops "fell in," and, led by guides, went forward to try if possible to carry the enemy's main position by assault, and capture their guns. The West Yorks were upon the right of the line, the East Surrey, with the "Queens," on the centre and left. Later on the Border Regiment came up in support. Picking their way down the rough, rock-strewn hillside, then across the intervening low ground, dongas and all, they began to climb the barn-roof-like mountain where the Boers had been in force the previous evening.

Silence had been well maintained, and no alarm, so far, had been raised by the Boer sentries. The hope was to close in, so that only the bayonet need be brought into requisition. Step by step the soldiers drew nearer to the crest as the first faint glimmer of dawn streamed in the sky. The West Yorks had turned the west side of the mountain by 3.30 a.m. Upward they had climbed without halting. They crossed a shoulder, near a wall, and came into view upon the skyline, whilst the East Surreys were struggling up the opposite slope. Either through the challenge of a Boer patrol, or through mistake, a shot or two were fired, and these were followed up by a volley from the Surrey men into the West Yorks. At the same instant the troops, believing they were quite near the summit, cheered, and, with gleaming bayonets, rushed to carry the position. There were a few

dropping shots, direction was lost in one corner, and some of the soldiers upon the left, in the dark, ran into the outlying sections of the West Yorks nearest them. A collision was just averted, but not before several of our men were wounded by bayonet and rifle at the hands of comrades. Rapid explanations saved the situation, and, in a breath, forward at the double ran the troops to the tiptop of the ridge. Then only a handful of Boers remained, and were soon disposed of, one of their dead being a big artillery-man, whose clothes bore the name of Adolph Krantz. With their customary cunning, the enemy had shifted their quarters to the rear after dark. Your Boer in his strategy is much like the American Indian, whose camp-fires burn in one place whilst he goes to sleep in another. Even by day he strives to conceal his real position, by occupying ground in front or to right or left, which he relinquishes when pressed, as these points are usually commanded from his laager. In this case their camp was upon an even higher hill, a mile or so in the rear.

So far as could be seen the tally of Boer dead did not exceed three or four, and we took but one prisoner. Our own loss up till that moment was even less, two killed and six or eight wounded. Subsequently I learned that as the result of the day's action the enemy had lost thirty-three killed, or, at any rate, they had dug and made use of that number of graves. At 2.30 a.m. the foreign officer

commanding the Boer artillery, six guns, objecting to the weakness of the escort left to guard the battery, withdrew his cannon from the hilltop to the second position. It was solely owing to that circumstance that the assault did not result in the capture of the whole of the Boer cannon upon our front. General Joubert was in command in person, and had with him about 6000 men, whilst at no great distance there was another commando with six guns. Hearing the oncoming British infantry, the few hundreds of Boers holding the crest fled pellmell downhill, leaving behind them over sixty horse, many rifles, saddles, and several waggons, together with a quantity of personal belongings. Amongst the horses were two with side-saddles, showing that ladies had been visiting the Boer camp and had left in a hurry, preferring to race downhill afoot. In the dark it was not seen that the horses were nearly all riderless. They were in the rush fired into, and about a score were shot, killed and wounded. The others, however, were captured and brought into Estcourt.

It has been one of the eye-openers to some of our people to see how quickly the Boers have managed to haul their big guns about from place to place, even dragging them to the top of what look like inaccessible hills. The smart manner in which the "Long Tom" and other guns were sent down in time to escape the clutches of the West Yorks, who marched and fought magnificently, is astonishing.

Considering the roughness of the descent they could only have passed the infantry by a few minutes at most. In range their French and Krupp guns greatly exceed our own field artillery of similar calibre, and no fault can be found with the accuracy of the enemy's aiming. I do not speak of the Natalian 7-pounder muzzle-loaders, or our ditto mountain guns, which do not merit serious consideration. They are of no practical value in a war of this kind or against white men. The sooner all such army weapons are converted into kerbstone corner-protectors the better for the troops. It is not a pleasant spectacle to see, as I have seen, guns of that kind, with a range of but a little over 3000 yards, again and again quite outclassed by Boer cannon. The Natalian gunners for competency and pluck leave nothing to be desired, but they should have been armed with batteries of a more modern type. But are our own home Volunteer artillery much better off in that respect? If so, it is a recent change.

Our troops who lined the captured crest did very little "potting" at the enemy before they were "rattled" by Boer cannon, fired from the adjacent commanding ridge. Daylight had lighted up the situation, and something of the evil of the rain and cold had gone. The morning was comparatively calm and dry, and the light good. Smartly the Boer guns swept the crest held by our men, but doing relatively little hurt to anybody, as I have

more than once remarked before. Whether from "Long Tom" or machine guns, the shells mostly "plugged" into the moist ground, and when they burst blew harmlessly upwards. But by-and-by the summit grew warmer, for the Boer marksmen found the range with their rifles. As the task set the men had been completed, and Boer commandoes were swarming in to reinforce Joubert, it was deemed wise, as without doubt it was, to retire towards Estcourt, where only two battalions and a few guns remained to hold that important position, and guard the bridges over the little Bushman's River. The East Surrey and the Queen's were withdrawn, and came in on the way for a sharp fusillade.

Meanwhile the West Yorks and detachments of the Volunteer Cavalry were engaged in checking the oncoming enemy and carrying back the dead and wounded. The bluejackets, with their 12-pounders upon Beacon Hill, were doing their best to stop the Boers, but failed to reach the enemy's big gun. A further difficulty was to locate the exact position of the Boer cannon. Our Field Battery, upon the same hillside, was withdrawn without firing a shot. In truth the battery referred to fell back before the West Yorks and parties of the cavalry had returned, much to the intense and partly openly-expressed mortification of many officers and men. It had been under fire, but had not replied, nor did it do so until towards the

close of the action. Men began to drop faster upon the captured kopje from Boer bullets. Colonel Kitchener ordered a general withdrawal, but some few of his own and another command either did not hear the instruction or were too bitterly engrossed in the fierce contest. Over two score had already fallen, killed or wounded. Although the enemy regained the crest, several of the West Yorks and one or two others clung to the ground at one end for a little longer, and subsequently managed to get away. A few hundred yards downhill part of our men made pause near the wall to recover the rest of the dead and wounded who had fallen by the way. A Reservist and ex-London grocer, Private Burgoyne, a swart-bearded, stalwart fellow, had his thigh-bone smashed and his ankle shot through. The wounded left limb was driven and twisted across the right leg as the soldier lay prone. Unable to straighten it, he called to a comrade to pull it over into its proper place. His mate obliged him, and Burgoyne never murmured, notwithstanding the pain it caused. Grasping his rifle, he was able to load and fire twenty-five shots before the Boers retook the hill. He is sure that his aim was good and that he bowled at least four of the enemy over before he was taken prisoner.

A man of the East Surrey, "shinning" down, was cornered by a mounted Boer, who presented a rifle at him, and said, "You come with me." "My rifle also happened to be loaded," said the

Surrey man, as later on he recounted the adventure, "and it went off first. He took a tumble, and I took his horse and came in on it, and here it is." Of course, discipline is not always either lynx-eyed or even two-eyed, and "Tommy" sold that Boer mount for "a bit" the same day, but he made one of his officers a present of the deceased Boer's rifle.

Scores of heroic deeds were performed, although at times the rifle-fire was so hot that it was not safe to put your finger upon the wall. The enemy also speedily brought up their repeating Hotchkiss 3-pounder cannon, and from the summit made the vicinity of the wall and hillside an Inferno. It had all been done within an hour. Bottomly, Chapman, and other Natal men strove to aid the wounded. The former tried to pull men through the wall, and failing to do so, boldly lifted at least one over into relative security. Others too feeble were hit where they lay on the exposed side of the wall. The Boers, the better to see and shoot at the retreating soldiers, actually stood up and fired their rifles. Then it was, had the field battery remained in position upon Beacon Hill slopes, that it could have wrought havoc amongst the enemy, and covered the withdrawal. Trooper Fitzpatrick, a brother of the author, was pierced through the brain with a Boer bullet whilst trying to succour the wounded. Other members of the Imperial Light Horse, to which corps he belonged, did equally noble work, at

the same time fighting side by side with the West Yorks and the mounted infantry company of the King's Royal Rifles. But the place got far too hot; so, having sent down four dead and twenty wounded, troopers and footmen had to get away downhill as best they could. In the face of a terrible storm of Mauser bullets, followed for twelve or fourteen hundred yards farther, they got into the low ground going round the shoulders of Beacon Hill. But the enemy's guns pursued them with shrapnel and common shell, the Hotchkiss venomously following the troopers and linesmen. Lieutenant Davis, of the King's Royal Rifles, though under fire for the first time, when near the wall referred to, and within 300 yards of the enemy, dismounted and assisted a wounded man upon a horse which Private Trestrow had run and caught.

Once the troops had got near Beacon Hill they secured help and cover. The naval gun remained for some time banging at the enemy's guns, and probably put one of their lesser fry out of action. By 11 a.m. they were ordered in, and so slowly trekked with difficulty downhill towards Estcourt. Steadily, without flurry, our mounted volunteers and infantry retired, whilst the Boer threw shells from "Long Tom" hither and thither amongst men, waggons, and horses without causing half a dozen casualties. A medical officer and bearer-party were fired upon, and prevented from going to the assistance of the wounded, and the ambulance did not

escape a spatter of bullets. Gradually the troops marched back up the Willow Grange-road into the camps, the enemy dropping shells to within half a mile of the position ordinarily held by our outlying pickets. Very few of the Boers, however, showed any real disposition to descend into the low ground and use their rifles. Less than a score of rounds from the field battery ended any such intention of theirs, and so by 1 p.m. the conflict closed. Strong outposts were maintained by the troops left behind in camp, whilst the weary, wet, and hungry West Yorks, Queen's, and East Surrey marched in to enjoy well-earned refreshment and repose. Our total losses in the battle of Beacon Hill were within one or so of sixteen killed and seventy-one wounded, besides a loss of seven prisoners. Among the latter were Major Hobbs, the second in command of the West Yorks, who, worn-out and unable to make his way downhill, it is said, stayed behind to help the wounded. I have since learned that he is well, and was taken by Joubert, *viâ* Weenen, to Colenso and Pretoria, a place which by-and-by should have its name most properly changed in honour of our Queen, and be known hereafter as "Victoria."

On Thursday evening one of the Army medical officers proceeded with ambulances to endeavour to bring in our wounded, and an engine ran down the line towards Willow Grange, to render assistance if necessary. But the Boers refused to permit of

anything being done that day. On Friday Major Jennings, R.A.M.C., went out towards Willow Grange, to bring in the dead and wounded left out. A Boer medical officer had come in to the outposts about 2 p.m. the same day, bearing a letter, couched in his customary style, from General Joubert, offering to hand over our dead and wounded and asking us to return his. As we had none of theirs, that part of the arrangement was easily disposed of. Not until it was quite dark were the ambulance party led by a circuitous route to where the Boers had their laager. There six dead soldiers and a score of wounded were placed upon stretchers and carried downhill to the ambulances. The enemy bade Major Jennings return at once to Willow Grange or Estcourt, saying that they would not guarantee that the party would escape being fired upon if they failed to go away.

In the dark, finding the track as best they could, the ambulances were brought into Willow Grange. There were known to be seven or eight dead soldiers upon the sides of the battle-ground hill, but the night was too dark and the men too tired to attempt their recovery. It is satisfactory to know from Burgoyne and others that the Boers attended to them as promptly and kindly as to their own wounded, giving them brandy and beef-tea, and dressing and bandaging their wounds. Major Jennings said the dressings were plain, but in all cases had been put carefully and properly on, and,

so far as he saw from the enemy's means, the wounded had received excellent treatment. Those left upon the hill had been, where possible, placed upon mattresses and covered with blankets, and supplied with proper nourishment. Burgoyne was complimented for his bravery, and for his fortitude in bearing their treatment without flinching and without the administration of anæsthetics. The Boer doctors certainly spoke highly of him, and shook him by the hand at parting; and it is said Joubert himself did the same, and called him "My brave man." Happily, even in war the humane side of nature finds scope for goodly deeds.

CHAPTER IX

JOUBERT'S RETREAT FROM ESTCOURT

Frere, November 29, 1899

YOUR militant South African Boer is a strange human mixture. He has the dual nature portrayed in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," strongly developed. In his inimitable, untutored, boorish way he can be courteous and kind, anon brutal, savagely cruel, and destructive. Whether there is method in his madness and transitions does not at the moment concern me. I am content to be a mere chronicler of facts. More than once Boer leaders and simple burghers have respected not only the property and persons, but the adverse opinions of those opposed to them. With real delicacy they have striven to lessen the hardships incidental to military occupation and the stern demands of war. Homesteads have frequently been held sacred, and not so much as a cup of coffee commandeered. Even the liberty of private persons, non-combatants, has at times been left considerately intact. Again and again they have treated our wounded in the most

generous manner, treating wounds on the principle of first come first doctored, and furnishing those who fell into their hands with not only necessaries, but little luxuries, giving them both drink and tobacco. It is gratifying to think that even what has almost degenerated into a racial war has not quite dammed the flood-gates of human sympathy and charity for others. So may it continue to be with the strong sons, our soldiers, of our strong nation. General Joubert has done many kindly acts, and, whenever he or his doctors have been unable to treat our wounded, they have sent them in to us, as they did after the action fought the other day near Beacon Hill. His conduct may not have been actuated in these instances by the absolute guilelessness of the dove. Let us not be captious, for his act of courtesy afforded us the comforting duty of ministering to the wants of our own troops stricken in battle.

The frequent metempsychosis of the Boer burgher from good Dr. Jekyll into the demoniacal Mr. Hyde has been much in evidence of late. One can pass over his notorious and almost innate habit of terrorizing, beating, and even killing without mercy, any native who may have happened to have aroused his suspicions or incurred his ire. So great is the Kaffir dread of the Boer that no native but prefers to flee from him, rather than run counter to his plans or risk the rude strokes dealt by the irate burgher. Of late, within the past two days, I have

seen with my own eyes that of which I should have hesitated to have believed your ordinary burgher capable, evidences of wild, criminal destruction of property. At Colenso and elsewhere I had noticed that not only was the Boer addicted to lifting cattle, confiscating forage, food, and other articles belonging to private persons, but that he often wasted what he could not carry away, or pressed natives to "help themselves." In this last raid of Joubert's commando, another stage has been reached. From Mooi River to Frere, not only has there been wholesale looting of cattle and all kinds of private property, but there have been repeated instances of wanton destructiveness. Judged by the canons of European or civilized warfare, the acts were those of brigandage, and the culprits, had they been caught red-handed, deserved trial by drumhead court-martial, and to be led out for execution. In Ennersdale and Frere, more particularly, I have been in private dwellings, once happy homes, stores, and public places, where the Boer sackers, not content with stripping the premises of every vestige of furniture, have vilely defaced the walls, and smashed the doors and windows of the empty abodes. Articles they had no use for or could not remove they broke up and strewed about, and used sheep-dips and other compounds wherewith to smear the room, walls, and floors of erstwhile snug Colonial homes. I will do many of the leaders and better burghers the justice to say that, even now, I

believe these outrages must shock and vex them. They are, perhaps, the acts of ferocious, stupid fellows, maddened by the knowledge that the fortune of war has at last begun to run counter to their mad dreams.

Whilst Joubert's commando, variously estimated at from 4000 to 8000 men, with six guns, was menacing us at Estcourt, a Free State commando, with an equal number of cannon and but 3000 or 4000 burghers, was endeavouring to crush or drive off the British troops guarding Mooi River. At Estcourt Major-General Hildyard commanded, and his forces comprised two naval 12-pounders, one field battery Royal Artillery, battery of Natal 7-pounders, about 800 Mounted Natalian Volunteers, and a company of the King's Royal Rifles Mounted Infantry, with the Dublin Fusiliers, Devons, Border Regiment, Queen's West Surrey, East Surrey, and West Yorks. Major-General Barton held the Mooi River crossings and town of that name with two field batteries, 500 or more of Thorneycroft's Horse, a Natal corps, and the Union Brigade, viz. the Royal Fusiliers, Scottish Fusiliers, Irish Fusiliers, and Royal Welsh Fusiliers. The Free State commandoes took up a position on the high ground north of Mooi River, and vigorously shelled the camp, but did scarcely any damage, only one man being killed and one or two wounded. It is questionable whether the half-dozen casualties in Barton's Brigade were

not as much due to the firing of our own men on picquet as to the shells and bullets of the enemy. There was a slight skirmish between the Boers and our infantry, but they never got to close quarters.

At Estcourt we were let severely alone by the enemy on Friday and Saturday last. In fact, there were reports brought in by farmers on November 25 (Saturday), that the Boers were trekking back, taking their loot and stolen cattle with them. The news to some extent was confirmed by the capture of two of the enemy's despatch-riders near Ennersdale by a party of mounted Volunteers. Bethune's Horse had gone forward on patrol. They were halted under the brow of a hill, and a few men went on afoot to survey the ground. It happened that the Boer despatch-riders were then just ascending the reverse slope of the hill. Seeing the troopers, and mistaking them for some of their own burghers, the Boers waved their arms, to which Bethune's men responded. Then the two parties came together, the Boers discovered their mistake, but at once surrendered, making no effort to fight or escape. Amongst the despatches they carried were a number of copies of telegrams received from Kruger and Dr. Rietz in Pretoria, calling upon Joubert at once to return to Ladysmith and prepare for moving homeward. Mrs. Joubert had also forwarded wifely greeting to her spouse, asking whether she should come and join

him, declaring her intention of doing so promptly unless he returned or sent for her. I go not into the methods of her reasoning, but the message, despite its complexity of meaning, was womanly and loving. The official *précis* of the captured papers given to the Press and public by the military was as follows :—

"Despatches taken on Boer prisoners captured by patrol of Bethune's Horse, under Lieutenant Annesley, this day (November 25), point to successful advance of our forces in the Free State. A battle was fought at Belmont on the 24th, in which Boers state their losses were ten killed and forty wounded, and were forced to retire. English losses unknown. Fight lasted from daybreak until noon. In order to restore order among the burghers the General was forced to withdraw in direction of Wardan. Burghers not lost courage. Heavy fighting at Belmont on the 24th. Reinforcements of British still keep arriving at Stormberg and Nauuwpoort. Commandant Botha left Ladysmith to-day with one gun and Maxim and 200 men in direction of Weenen-Greytown. He must receive orders from you at Greytown if you approve his attacking the Carbineers, who have the forts on the southern side of the Tugela. Piet Reitfers attacked them yesterday from the north. Difficulty is river is full. Must drive away the Carbineers because they will always be a source of danger, and always render necessary a strong force being kept back."

That, with the further knowledge that the Boers were destroying the railway as well as clearing off the colonists' herds in all directions, convinced me that they had begun a retrograde movement. It seemed to be the proper moment for pushing a joint attack home upon their scattered commandoes, the Mooi River Brigade joining with Major-General Hildyard's in harassing the retreating enemy. We were never so completely invested at Estcourt that there was any serious doubt or delay in getting communications through Generals Clery or Barton.

On Friday, Saturday, and subsequently this week, there were military funerals, attended by Major-General Hildyard and the whole of the Brigade Staff, of those who fell at the Beacon Hill action. The local vicar, Mr. Prior, officiated for the Church of England, and Father Murphy for the Roman Catholic dead. One of the saddest cases was that of Interpreter Chapman, a smart young Natalian. He had survived the battle until the closing scenes. Lingering behind till the last moment, he was shot, and instantly killed—some say by our own men, as he was so far out that he was mistaken for a Boer. It is the case that a number of the wounded have been hit by Lee-Metfords, for the doctors have extracted the bullets. The belief is current that there has been a good deal of hasty firing, and that deplorable mistakes have been made. But it should not be overlooked

that the Boers have secured many of our soldiers as prisoners, and are, perhaps, using their rifles and ammunition against us. There have been some marvellous escapes from fatal wounding. Although there is no Röntgen ray apparatus at Estcourt—are there not too few with the Army Medical Department?—several splendid and successful operations have been performed in the sanatorium and convent, which has been converted into the chief hospital. One man shot through the abdomen, the intestines being perforated, has been so treated that he is now in a fair way to recovery. Had it not been for the enterprise of Surgeon-Major Bruce at Ladysmith, not even there would the Röntgen ray and the electric light have been introduced into the operating-room. Those who know anything of modern surgery are aware how useful the electric light can be made.

There was a resolving of all doubts during Saturday afternoon about the intention of the Boers to retreat. Estcourt was no longer invested, although some preternaturally sharp-eyed citizens professed to discover that the enemy were still holding or loitering about the vicinity of Beacon Hill. They never seriously attempted to seize the latter commanding eminence, which quite overlooks the western side of Estcourt, thus affording another indication that they were in no great force. Our cavalry picquets and patrols wisely kept a sharp eye and strong hand upon Beacon Hill, and it was

from there the signs first came that there was a movement going forward in the Boer camps. It leaked out, from reconnaissances made by Colonel Martyn, and the information brought in by farmers and natives, that Joubert and the Free Staters were leaving us. On Saturday, November 25, the Free State commandoes met General Joubert and his men near Highlands. The Free Staters had come up from Mooi River, and were going westward towards Ulundi, and thence by a *détour* to Colenso, getting rid on the way of their reived cattle by sending most of them up the passes over the Drakensberg. Joubert was going south, thence east, and back round outside of Weenen to the Tugela drifts and Ladysmith.

The manœuvre they were executing was very like that disastrous naval operation called "the gridiron evolution." They met each other just after daybreak near Willow Grange. Those civilian prisoners who saw them, say there was much handshaking and congratulations as the commandoes passed loosely side by side. "How are you's, Free Staters?"—"How are you's, Transvaalers?" No time was wasted for more formal interchange of greetings, and in Boer fashion either force rode smartly onward, going straight over country to the different points aligned for passing. No wire fencing, absence of roads, gulleys, or drifts stopped their progress. Carelessly and freely they rode forward. Very much in the same free-and-easy style do they unharness their

yoke animals and off-saddle their steeds whenever they decide upon a halt or laager. They apparently have little apprehension of being caught napping by our troops. Whenever our Generals have a larger mounted force they should be cured of that restful indifferentism. So rapidly and safely did Joubert and the Free Staters slip out of our troops' fingers, that the main bodies were far beyond reach and over the Tugela before we began to move. Joubert, indeed, crossed by a drift on Sunday night, and by Monday was back at his lines around Ladysmith. They left fairly strong rear-guards, about 800 in each, loitering a day's march behind them. Apparently the Free State commandoes were more worn out than Joubert's men, who looked fit and were all fairly well mounted. The Free Staters had several hundred who had lost their horses and their rifles, and were marching on foot. Most of the waggons and ambulances were in the rear of the respective main columns. As it rained terribly throughout Friday night, the Mooi River, Little Bushman, and the Tugela—not to speak of the Blaaukrantz—were all swollen, and had we had a strong cavalry brigade, few if any of Joubert's so-called Maritzburg column or raiding party should have got back across the Tugela.

Late on Saturday night orders were issued to re-open communications by rail and telegraph with Mooi River and the south. Engines and gangsmen were told to hold themselves in readiness to

start out at daybreak, and a cavalry force was ordered forward towards Frere and Colenso. By means of runners and despatch riders Major-General Barton was made aware of General Hildyard's situation and plans. By breakfast-time on Sunday the few breaks made in the railway by the Boers had been repaired and the wires joined up. At Willow Grange and Highlands the enemy had wrecked the interior station buildings and several private houses. They had their field hospital in a homestead but a short distance off, but that had been evacuated. Only a few of their scouts could be seen about the hills watching the operations of restoring the line, which was done under the escort of a small body of troops. By noon the railway and telegraph had been restored, and part of Major-General Barton's brigade, which left Mooi River at 2.30 a.m., had arrived at Estcourt. The first of the command to put in an appearance was Thorneycroft's cavalry, under the Earl of Dundonald, and a field battery. About 1.30 p.m. the infantry marched in without having had a handful of men fall out by the way on the twenty-two miles of hard going. It was a fine feat, and, in the colloquialism of the day, the Fusilier Brigade did not seem to have turned a hair, nor the 2nd Devons, who footed the distance with them. They had only just managed to get a peep at the Boer scouts as the latter hurried off Colenso-ward. Although it had been kept a profound secret, it leaked out amongst us that Sir Redvers Buller

had unexpectedly arrived at Maritzburg, and to that inspiriting General we attributed the burst of new life and energy which had permeated all quarters.

Major-General Hildyard scarcely waited for the advent of even the head of Major-General Barton's brigade at Estcourt, setting out with his whole force in the morning for Frere. His troops were all on the move forward before midday, the Dublin Fusiliers, whose presence and mess were always as enjoyable as a breath of fresh air, following later on. Of course, General Buller wanted to speak over the telephone to Major-General Hildyard, to learn from that officer's lips what the situation actually was. As Major-General Hildyard had gone to Frere, he could not at the moment be got at, but Colonel Long, R.A., was, and did some listening and a little talking through to his Commander-in-Chief at Maritzburg. But the Natal Railway authorities, who have all along rendered cordial and splendid help to the military, were already busily getting the railway line and telegraph restored through to Frere. Both railroad and wires had been broken and torn up in several places by the Boers upon the north as well as the south of Estcourt. Ere midnight the lines had both been repaired sufficiently to permit of their being again used for military purposes.

I ran up to Frere on Monday, 27th. A sprawling camp of tents had arisen around the

railway station. But on the ridge, a mile and half nearer Colenso, were the true lines. There a battery had been placed and trenches dug for the infantry commanding the slopes to the south away down in the direction of Chieveley. All around were evidences of the Boers' worst propensities—looting and house and home-wrecking. Thirty or forty Boers, before the advent of the troops, had placed four boxes of explosives upon the iron girder bridge which, in two spans each of 100 feet, carried the railroad over the Blaaukrantz. It is not an ordinarily deep or unfordable stream, for there are numerous drifts, but the banks and slopes are steep. Placing a box of dynamite and three boxes of roburite, as we learned from natives and the marks upon the empty packing-cases, upon each of the girders about ten or twenty feet from the central stone pier, the charges were detonated and the stout ironwork was cut and blown into separate sections. These fell in a wreckage of girders, plates, and scrap-iron forty feet downward upon the rocky bed of the Blaaukrantz. A huge plate was blown a quarter of a mile away from the bridge. Chief Engineer Shaws and the other railway officials decided that the quickest way to get the line running beyond Frere, was to construct a wooden girder bridge on the west side of the wreckage. That has already been begun, the timbers being framed at Durban; and it is hoped to have the work completed by next Monday.

Many of the local Dutchmen known to be in sympathy with the Boers had left the locality. It is said that the enemy have been guided about from place to place in Natal by these traitorous citizens. In the house of one of them living near Frere, a Natal Colonist called Zeitsman, were to-day found a large number of photo negatives of various railway bridges between Estcourt and Colenso. Mr. Zeitsman has decamped or disappeared, and so has a neighbour of his called Henrik Hatting. Of these an accounting hereafter.

It was a gladsome sight to many at Estcourt to see on Monday the arrival of a strong naval detachment under Captain Jones, of her Majesty's ship *Forte*. The bluejackets brought with them four 12-pounders and two large guns, 4.7-inch, firing lyddite shells. A further contingent is expected from her Majesty's ship *Powerful* and other ships, with two more 4.7-inch guns and naval 12-pounders. Lieutenant James, R.N., of the *Tartar*, and his men got their two 12-pounders into position in front of Frere on Sunday. As for the railroad trucks of the smashed armour-clad train, they are a little over a mile north of Frere. The cannonading of the Boers, and the smashing of the engine, has crumpled them up like newspapers cast aside under the seat in a railway train. Mauser bullets have also passed through the armour-plating in many places, showing that the Boers were latterly firing at very short ranges. On Tuesday and

to-day further reinforcements went forward to Frere, and supplies of all kinds are being hurried up and accumulated for the now early advance to the relief of Ladysmith. Yesterday Earl Dundonald, who has taken over the cavalry command from Colonel Martyn, who leads the Mounted Infantry, proceeded on a reconnaissance to Colenso. Major Mardall, of the Natal Police, proceeded with a few men towards the village. As he drew within 800 yards of the house he was sharply fired upon by Boer scouts occupying Colenso; and in a few minutes the Boer cannon, posted across the river upon Grobeler's Kloof, opened upon him and Dundonald's troopers and two batteries. Our gunners came into action, and a hot though brief artillery duel ensued. Their guns far outranged ours, part of their advantage arising from firing from high ground. The enemy's shells dropped in every direction, falling near the gunners, and again and again amongst the squadrons. Strange to say, not a man of ours received so much as a scratch, and the force was trotted back out of range.

Estcourt, December 1, 1899.

Little has occurred within the past few days beyond the further despatch of troops of all arms and munitions to Frere. Within three days all will be in readiness for the forward movement. Whether Joubert will risk fighting the big battle of the war at or near Colenso remains to be seen. I doubt it,

because his interest would lie in fighting with his back nearer the Drakensberg, and without being sandwiched—as he soon will be—between two English armies: White's and Clery's. I take it at the moment that General Buller will lead the relief column in person. He ran up secretly to Frere last night. Two more 4.7-inch naval guns, as well as pontoons and electric searchlights, have gone to the front. Major-Generals Lyttelton and FitzRoy Hart are expected here with a portion of their respective brigades, the Rifles and the Irish Brigade. General Joubert's adjutant is a renegade named Hawkins. That gentleman evidently likes to hunt with the hounds as well as run with the hares, for he has been parting with information to local civilians temporarily detained as prisoners by the Boers. He has now come to the conclusion that though the Boers fight well enough, they have little or no chance of escaping a drubbing at a very early day. Many of them are tired of the war, and he does not believe that it will last much longer, probably not more than a month.

Day by day we hear the guns at Frere pounding Ladysmith. The enemy have taken again to bombarding by night as well as by day. Joubert has declared that he will take the place before the relief column can arrive; but that is quite improbable, for their ammunition is still reported abundant. That is, for rifles and the ordnance under the 4.7-inch guns. Two civilians arrived here on Wednesday,

and a native late last night from Ladysmith. Messrs. Young and Mitchell, the former, left Ladysmith on November 25, all well. By rare good luck the Kaffir Government runner left only on November 29. Having slipped through the enemy's picquets, he was fortunate to find that there was an alarm amongst the blacks that the English Army was coming on to shell the Dutch on the west of Ladysmith, so they were fleeing south in a body. He joined these bands of fugitives, and so arrived at Frere unchallenged. To-day the cannonading still goes on against Ladysmith, for we can hear it plainly from the ridges around Frere, which is twelve miles, as the crow flies, north of Estcourt. There is a small Boer patrol still in Colenso village, and I learn a commando or patrol of 100 burghers watching us on the east side, who retire before our cavalry towards the Tugela, far below Colenso. At last Estcourt has been cleared of its glut of supplies and trains. It is now little more than an hospital-station, for which its excellent healthy situation and abundant water-supply render it remarkably suitable. The weather has once more shown signs of becoming settled, warm, and dry. May it so continue, for the sake of the troops and the work before them for just one week.

Farmers state that Major Hobbs, of the West Yorks, taken prisoner by the Boers when looking after the wounded at Beacon Hill Battle, is looking well. He has not been wounded. They have sent

him on to Pretoria with five or six soldiers also captured at that time. All our dead left out upon that field have been recovered and buried within the last day or two. The Boers secured all the Lee-Metfords of our dead and wounded.

CHAPTER X

THE CAMP AT FRERE

Frere, December 5, 1899

"WHAT sort of camp is Frere?" "Oh, it's all right," answered one of the Dublins (Fusiliers) to a new arrival. "It's not as good as the Curragh, and the little stream—spruit, they call it—is a poor thing, where we draw khaki water for drinking and cooking." The description answers perfectly, for the spruit holds but a succession of muddy pools, and the water only flows when there are heavy rains. Natal is not a land of forests nowadays, whatever it may have been formerly. There are trees called the "thornbush," but these are but scrub mimosas or acacias. Frere is in the scrubless region. It is the name of a railway station, near which about five or six houses have been built, by no means contiguous to each other. Around is the veldt, undulating, and even in this ripe springtide none too thickly carpeted with grass. To the west, piercing the clouds, stands the lofty pinnacled

Photo by] AMMUNITION CARTS: WATERING MULES AT FRERE. [*D. Barnett.*

Drakensberg chain, colloquially known as "The Berg." Cathkin Peak, Giant's Castle, and all the great kops or kopjes trending away to the north are clearly visible. From the top of the low ridges north of Frere, where Hildyard's Brigade, with the naval and other batteries, guard the front of our spacious camp, lying screened in the hollows, can be seen the hills around Dundee, and to the east Job's Kop and the mountains of Zululand.

On the arrival of Lieut.-General Clery at Frere he established his headquarters at the windowless, doorless, looted house of the railway stationmaster. It is, despite the interior wreckage wrought by the Boers, a pretty pavilion-roofed East African homestead, begirt by verandahs and trellis-work, the whole set in a little orchard of peaches, hedged by stately eucalyptus. Major-General Hildyard removed his quarters to the next house, a roomy cottage half a mile up the line, where he and his Staff, including his Highness Major Prince Christian Victor, all dwell under the same roof. In the wild, stormy weather of Natal a roof-tree, though of galvanised iron, is preferable to the best of tents that have yet been made. Day by day the camp increases in size; the heavily-freighted frequent railway trains from Durban and Maritzburg bring soldiers, horses, mules, guns, and abundance of munitions of war. In the order named, from left to right, the Border Regiment, Queen's, and West

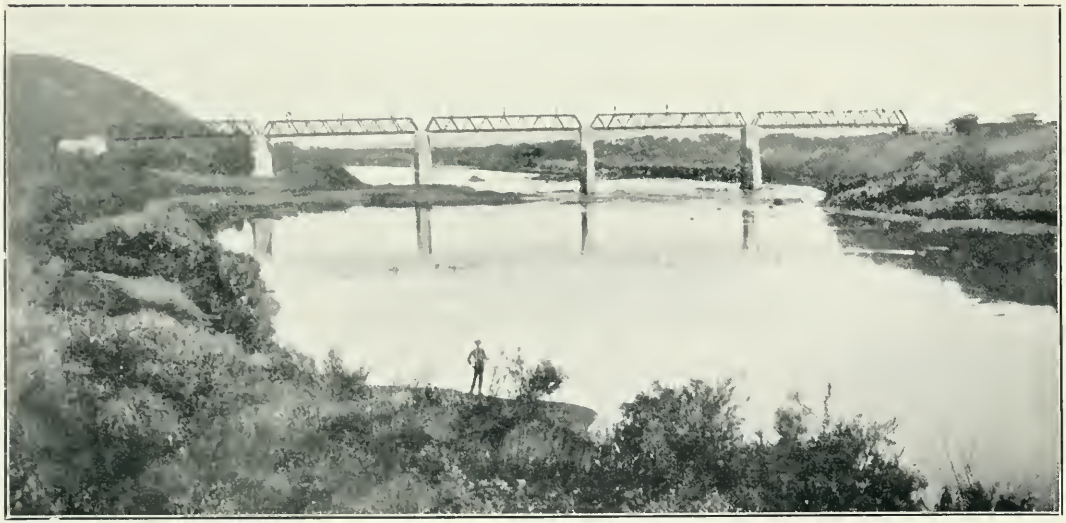
Yorks hold the low ridges to the north of Frere, about one and three-quarters mile to the front. Their tents lie in the hollow behind the hill. The picquets' outposts have protected the position by digging shallow trenches and raising low stone walls impregnable to musketry fire. With more practical care than I have generally seen bestowed in our campaigns, the faces of the trenches and walls have been covered with earth and grass, so that it is difficult at but a little distance to tell whether they are works or but part of the hills' rough sides. Lieutenant James, R.N., with his bluejackets, has also got his two naval 12-pounders in excellent positions. We are, it appears, to have quite a big naval gunnery brigade with us at the relief of Ladysmith. Captain Jones, R.N., of her Majesty's ship *Forte*, has not only the 4.7-inch ship guns mounted upon a rough-and-ready land carriage designed by Captain Scott, R.N., but he will have in addition, all told, fourteen of the long-range naval 12-pounders. There will be a detachment of 340 sailors and marines, of whom 99 are from her Majesty's ships *Forte*, *Philomel*, and *Tartar*.

We are all khaki, now. It is the fashionable colour. Guns, scabbards, accoutrements, as well as clothes, are done up in that colour somehow. The mode runs to horseflesh, for with permanganate of potash and water we are transforming our white and grey war-steeds into that ghostly neutral tint.

I have treated two of mine, and the white cover of my Cape-cart—which has drawn the enemy's shell-fire uncomfortably near more than once—to strong solutions of that excellent disinfectant. Preparations for the advance are proceeding rapidly. General Buller, who is at Maritzburg, and, as we hear, is coming through to take the command, will head a force of something like 20,000 men. By means of native runners, and our new corps of guides and scouts, drawn from Colonials, we are kept much better informed of what is going on in and around Ladysmith and Colenso. There is very little done in the Boer camps of which we do not get timely and complete details. Among the more recent indications of our advance are the detail of certain corps to hold the line of communication. The Durban Light Infantry, together with a battery of the Natal Field Artillery, have gone back to assist in holding Estcourt, Willow Grange, and Mooi River. By-and-by all these, and other points, such as Highlands and Nottingham Road, will be permanently and effectively safeguarded, so that no Boer raiders may cut in and destroy railway bridges, or tamper with the lines.

On Sunday I drove out several miles beyond the outposts towards Colenso. I was able to get a fairly close peep at the Boer patrols, and to see the extent of their camps and defensive works along the northern bank of the Tugela. From Grobler's Kloof—a rough, table-topped hill about a

thousand feet high, which rises a mile or so westward of Colenso Bridge—all along similar ridges running westward for seven or eight miles, they have their cannon and earthworks. The number of their guns is variously estimated at from eight to twenty. It is probably nearer the former. Probably two of their ordnance are Long Toms, or guns of position. When fired at our cavalry the other day, a shell from one of them dropped within a short distance of Chieveley, a flight of fully six miles as the crow flies. One of their missiles, which failed to explode, shows the gun is apparently a 45-pounder. All the farm buildings I noticed were quite deserted, and the live-stock, down to the meanest chicken, had disappeared. Mayhap many of the lesser farmyard brood : pigs, geese, turkeys, etc., found their way into our camp ovens. In the houses of several notorious Boer sympathisers, the owners of which had gone over to the enemy, I saw a good deal of property that had been looted from loyal English farmers. One of the runaways had managed to secure no fewer than four of his more æsthetic neighbours' pianos. The instruments were really excellent, for all came from the factories of distinguished makers. It was a case of "the engineer hoist with his own petard," so far as the fugitive-looting Boer farmers were concerned. The local Kaffirs from their beehive,—clustering kraals had invaded the homesteads of the thieves, and, in their search for money and valuables, had broken



COLENSO RAILWAY BRIDGE, ACROSS THE TUGELA —THE LINK BETWEEN COLENSO AND LADYSMITH.

furniture, ripped up all the bedding, and strewn the contents about the floors. Besides working that mischief, they had carried off clothing and all the smaller articles, except a few cracked plates and dishes.

On Monday there was a Natal change in the weather, which passed from bright English mid-summer sun and warmth to thunderstorms, accompanied by heavy rain and hail, tapering off to a miserable chill Scottish mist and drizzle. Through the mist and rain the outposts and patrols went and came, the latter occasionally interchanging a few shots with the Boer scouts loitering around Colenso. Troops, too, marched over from Estcourt, where, to lessen the congestion of traffic at the then rail-head—Frere—they had detrained. Astonishing progress had been made by the railway people, under their engineers, Messrs. Shaws and Cox, in the construction of the temporary trestle bridge. On Sunday no fewer than eight trusses were completed, and the more difficult part of the job was therefore finished. Had it been necessary, by working double shifts, night and day, the bridge could have been opened on Saturday. But the military were not ready, and there was no special reason for haste in getting traffic to Colenso resumed. Too much praise cannot be bestowed upon the General Manager of the Natal Government Railways, Mr. Hunter, and the whole of his staff, for the able and untiring manner in which they have

from first to last assisted the military operations. Their department could not have been in better hands, and the authorities have acted very wisely in leaving them to work and run the traffic during the war. Colonel Girouard, R.E., came through from Cape Town. When he saw how well things were being managed, and the smart manner in which the new bridge at Frere was being constructed, he said there was nothing to suggest. It was a surprise to him to find the Natalians so up-to-date in rapid "railroadizing."

Tuesday brought us its little affair of patrols. But the event of the week was the cavalry reconnaissance towards Colenso, made by the cavalry brigade and two batteries, under the Earl of Dundonald. The Boers were fairly drawn, for they fired their cannon from Grobler's Kloof, hundreds of the enemy standing up to watch the effect of their guns. Shell after shell was sent hurtling at our squadron and batteries. The aim was all right; but out of two-score of shots very few burst. Indeed, neither man nor horse received so much as a scratch on our side. Yet the shells fell, not only near, but occasionally between the lines of horses and guns. Their weapons had the range of ours, but that was partly due to their firing from such high ground. The wet, cloudy weather has had its advantages, for it has enabled runners to get in and out of Ladysmith and Colenso very easily, and also enabled General White to read the nightly electric searchlight messages flashed to

him. Another effort is being made to open up helio and lamp signalling into Ladysmith from Mount Umkolanda, beyond Weenen. That mountain can be seen from the low ground occupied by White's forces.

CHAPTER XI

GENERAL BULLER'S ARRIVAL

Frere, December 8, 1899

General Buller has arrived at Frere, and the matter of the relief of Ladysmith is now well in hand. All that, and much more, I, and no doubt others, longed to wire home. But the Press are once more in leading-strings. Our military masters are very careful of correspondents, as much so as any doting mothers can be of their tiniest darlings. There was a big cavalry reconnaissance, which the Commander-in-Chief himself conducted, but we pressmen, even in response to formal applications, were refused permission to accompany them—probably lest we might get hurt. We did the next best thing: went to the picquet-lines, and saw nearly everything that was done from that point of vantage. For over a week past it has been common gossip that General Buller was coming here to take command, but not a line about the subject were we allowed to send. Nay, even since his arrival the same restriction exists. And why? Possibly

lest the news should reach the Boers. As if they did not have a spy in nearly every Dutch farmer, and as if there were not daily railway communication with Durban, and wires round to Pretoria, *viâ* Lourenço Marques. But, in addition thereto, I fear —nay, have strong reason to suspect—that there are persons who, under the guise of innocent private wires, and notwithstanding their pledges of honour, are communicating information which pressmen are not permitted to send to the outer world. Besides all this there are the corps of foreign Consular Agents, who cannot be choked off from sending despatches. It is not the first time I have arraigned the whole British Army system of Press censorship, which is largely a sham and a delusion. But the first and last voice in the matter lies with the public, and if they are content, enough said. Still, should a day ever come when things go wrong and official reports are mistrusted, how is the nation to be saved from panic and folly? And in this connection I will add there should be no halting in the work of overthrowing the twin-conspiring Republics, the Transvaal and Orange Free State, while the whole of our loyal Colonists in Natal and at the Cape should have a voice—and a potent one—in whatever settlement is effected.

General Buller, who was looking remarkably well, accompanied by his Staff, arrived at Frere about 4 a.m., Wednesday, from Maritzburg. Early as the hour was the "Tommies" were on the alert,

and cheered the General's special. He was received at the station by Major-General Clery and others, and the Devons provided the guard of honour. Whilst the morning was yet young he received reports, made the round of the camps, and arranged to proceed at 1.30 p.m. with the cavalry and two batteries to reconnoitre the Boer position north of Colenso. He went down to the new trestle-work railway bridge, walked across upon the sleepers, and expressed to Mr. Shaws his satisfaction at the way the job had been accomplished. What, however, also appeared to interest him greatly was to know how long it would take the railway engineers to erect a temporary bridge over the Tugela at Colenso. That, he was told, depended on the amount of damage the Boers had wrought in blowing down that structure. It might possibly be so restored as to enable trains to be run across within eight or ten days. Frere Bridge is just over 200 feet long, the height of the central trestles 20 feet from the bed of the spruit. It carries a single line of rails. At either end a good deal of earthwork has been constructed for the diversion from and to the permanent-way. The work of cutting up and removing the wrecked iron bridge is rapidly progressing. From native and other reports it seems that, with dynamite or roburite, the Boers have blown over the piers nearest the banks on either side of the Colenso railway bridge. Besides that wreckage, they have cracked and bent

downwards the girders of the three central spans. If possible, the bent girders will be "jacked" up and repaired, and temporary spans placed over the end portions.

That same Wednesday morning funeral services were held over the graves of the victims of the armoured train disaster. Native accounts have it that seven or eight of our men, including the slaughtered railway *employés*, were buried in one common grave alongside the line and the scene of the fight. The Boers held a very strong position upon a rough, stony hill, within, by actual measurement, a few hundred yards of the wreckage. Their big gun was emplaced within 800 yards range. When the train passed on to Chieveley a party of the enemy stuffed the space between the guard-rails on the curve with stones and pieces of iron. It was that which threw the trucks off the rails, ending in the capsizing of two of them. The funeral services were conducted by the Anglican clergymen and the Roman Catholic chaplain, Father Matthews, of the Dublin Fusiliers, several of whom lie buried there. Our troops had but arrived at Frere when a number of the men of their own volition set about decorating and hedging-in the previously unmarked graves. Bit by bit it has grown into something like a work of art, with headstone and enclosing barbed-wire railing. Curb-stones have been placed round the tomb, and the cartridges fired in the action, which were stuck upon the grave to spell the record of

their glorious story, are now all buried close to the butts in cement. How any one managed to escape alive from the wrecked, shell-pierced carriages is little short of a miracle. To carry on a fight after such a catastrophe, for about an hour, against incredible odds, bespeaks much for the heroic valour of the soldiers. In the middle of the grave there lies a stone cross, on which is cut "R.I.P., Dublin Fusiliers and Durban Light Infantry. True till death." The tale told by the cartridge-case reads: "Erected by the 34th Regiment in memory of our comrades, who fell November 15, 1899." Upon the original headstone were the words: "Gone, but not forgotten." That was a day or two ago replaced by a more elaborate and carefully-carved memorial stone, cut by the hands of two soldiers.

Punctually at 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, Lord Dundonald's Cavalry Brigade went forward to reconnoitre; General Buller, who was accompanied by General Clery and part of the respective Staffs, had for escort a half-troop of the Natal Mounted Police. The force moved in three bodies, the central being the largest. Halting behind the ridge beyond Chieveley, and overlooking Colenso, General Buller and other officers, with several guides, advanced to the crest to scan the enemy's position and the state of the crossing. Though well within gunshot ranges—nay, almost rifle-range—not a shot was fired that day by the Boers at the cavalry. It also so happened that they had no patrols, or, at any

rate, none who cared to show themselves, hidden, as usual, in Colenso village. After studying the situation for over an hour, and learning all about the various drifts across the Tugela, General Buller rode back to his headquarters about 6 p.m., having completed the first and really brilliant reconnaissance of the Boer position. Strangely enough, also, that morning the Boers had shifted their main camp from the slopes of Grobler's Kloof—where it could be seen, towards the north-west—to Oonderbrook Spruit, near the junction of the two, big and little, Tugelas. From a strategical point of view their new position has for them advantages over their old one. It is out of the range of our guns, even of the naval 4.7-inch, and is so situated as to enable them to more rapidly head us off should the General decide to make a *détour* and ford the Tugela to the westward, so as to turn the Boer line of defences along the Colenso ridges. The consensus of military opinion seems to be that the ground being too rough and broken to the eastward, the chief column will try and effect a crossing far to the westward of Colenso. As for the cavalry, that will possibly be called upon to make a still wider *détour* in the same direction, passing through towards the grassy plains about Acton Homes, and turning into Ladysmith from the westward. There may be a frontal demonstration made at Colenso to occupy the enemy, but the crossing and preliminary fighting will, it may be safely assumed, take place to the westward.

Whilst these events were happening near Frere, Major Chichester, Provost-Marshal (Royal Irish), set out towards Springfield to arrest certain disloyal farmers, who were known to be aiding and abetting the Boers in their raiding expeditions. He took with him a score of the Natal Carbineers and six or seven Natal Police under Major Mardall, with a Colonial named Frances, as guide. Riding thirty miles westward during the night, he arrived at the residences of two "mean whites"—Cape Colony Dutch—named Oosthuisen, and caught them red-handed with looted property, which was identified by the owners, in their possession. Two of their neighbours, equally guilty, were also caught, but one or two others got away with some of the loot in waggons. Over 150 cattle and a number of horses, besides other property, were secured and taken back. The Boers had sent runners to call up a commando encamped near, and on the way back a patrol of six of the enemy attempted to ambuscade Major Chichester's party. The enemy took refuge in a donga, where our men managed to shoot the Boer horses. As night was coming on the enemy were left, and the whole party got back to Frere, after being twenty-six hours in the saddle, at 5 a.m. Thursday, without having a man hurt.

Rather an unfortunate affair occurred the same morning. Three Colonial scouts, forming part of a corps of guides familiar with the topography

of the district, rode forward towards Colenso. They had acted as escort to Major Elliott, R.E., who had gone out for several days to sketch the Boer positions from Stewart's Farm, north of Chieveley. As they went along just beyond Chieveley they saw a body of 200 horsemen riding towards them, most of whom were in their shirt-sleeves, for the mists had gone, and the day was decidedly hot. Nobody believed there was so big a body of Boers south of Colenso, and Nourse, one of the guides, declared that the men were Natal Volunteers, Bethune's Horse, or Border Mounted Infantry. But the other two, Smith and Glendenning, questioned that, and said they thought they were Boers. Nourse rode ahead to within 200 yards of the horsemen, and Glendenning and Smith were 100 yards behind him. Then they saw the men were Boers. Nourse had gone too far, and was captured, the others turned their horses about, and made a bolt for it. The Boers, for such they were, fired heavily at them, and Glendenning was hit in the leg, and, falling from his horse, is now a prisoner, with Nourse, in the enemy's hands. Smith, more fortunate, escaped.

Several days ago Captain Cayser, R.E., with a small party of signallers and guides, returned to Umkolanda Mountain, a lofty peak thirty miles eastward, from which Ladysmith can be seen. From the ridges beyond Frere we can see the Bulwan and note the bombarding of Ladysmith

from that height any day in the week. Since General Joubert's hurried return from his expedition to the south, the diurnal cannonading of Ladysmith has resumed something of its earlier briskness. Our electric searchlights, runners, and pigeons are but makeshifts; and so Captain Cayser's mission, like his previous desperate venture, was to open up regular inter-communication with General White and the beleaguered town. The vile weather made helio and lamp signalling impossible until Wednesday. On that date Captain Cayser just succeeded in re-opening communications. Thursday was bright and to-day is fair, and so he has managed to send in and receive hundreds of messages, for, from lofty Umkolanda, away beyond Weenen, he could flash right down into Sir George White's own quarters. It is satisfactory to learn that all goes as well as could be expected in Ladysmith. The garrison is in fine spirits, and looking to a speedy release and a chance of a battle with the enemy. To-day (Friday) all four infantry brigades will be concentrated at Frere, including Major-Generals Hildyard's, Barton's, FitzRoy Hart's, and the Hon. N. G. Lyttelton's—giving the names in order of arrival in camp here. The cavalry and artillery have also increased within the last day or two. Besides over 1500 or 1700 Colonial troopers, for the most part all excellent material, there is a brigade of Regulars and six batteries of artillery. The transport service is quite

complete, and the provisioning of the soldiers by the Army Service Corps has left nothing to be desired. "Tommy" has now a campaign ration, which includes such extras as bacon, jam, and milk—besides potatoes, tea, coffee, sugar, and daily issues of fresh bread and meat.

To-day a slight advance has been made of men and guns, for the camp is overflowing its boundaries. The Boers, alarmed from native and Dutch reports, are sending forward bodies of 100 to 200 horsemen to try and ascertain what General Buller is going to do. Parties of them have come down upon the east and west of us, penetrating down the Weenen road. Yesterday a small body, about 200, appeared near Mooi River, probably wishing to destroy the bridge; but the appearance of troops frightened them away. It appears likely that they may attempt to tear up the railway in a few places. Their chief aim, no doubt, is plunder; and both yesterday and to-day they have been looting cattle and food at no great distances from the railroad. An attempt will have to be made to "bag" some of these raiding bands, whether Free Staters or Joubert's men. Now that we have a large force of cavalry, that should not be an impossible task. Unquestionably, the Boers are suffering for want of variety in food, and their horses look weak and half-starved. An Irishman, himself an ex-navvy, who saw the havoc wrought by the enemy at Frere

Bridge, asked a gangsman if it were true that the Boers were breaking up the line—the dirty blackguards. When he learned that they had tried to destroy the railway entirely his observation was: "Then, by the powers, that will cost them something! Sure, after this war, a live Boer should be a curiosity." Camp chaff gives rise at times to odd remarks. A bluejacket, who was asked by a "Tommy" if he had heard Kruger was dead, not to be outclassed on a question of mere news, said, "Yaas." "Well, then, what did he die of?" asked the jocular soldier. "Why, of dynamite, lad," promptly rejoined the tar.

Yesterday (Thursday) Mr. Sydney Thorrald, cattle dealer and butcher, whom I had met in Ladysmith, arrived at Frere from that place. In the course of a long interview with me, he told me that he had carried official messages out to the authorities, as well as private communications. He left Ladysmith late last Tuesday night, and passing towards Modderspruit, he rounded the north side of Lombard's Kop. As he knew the ground thoroughly, he managed to get out and through without meeting a Boer. Turning south from Lombard's, he passed into the thornbush country, and so on down to Weenen. Luckily for him, the Boers had taken away nearly all the commandoes formerly kept on the north side of Ladysmith to strengthen their forces on the south, east, and west sides of the town. Their view was that

there would be no attempt made by the garrison to break out to the north, and so few men were required to keep guard there. Mr. Thorrald's story was that, with the exception of Major-General Hunter—who was slightly indisposed—nearly everybody was looking fairly well, considering the circumstances. The Earl of Ava, Colonel Frank Rhodes, and all the correspondents, seemed to be getting along firstrate. Many changes had been made in the disposition of the Army supplies and camps. Except those out on duty, everybody was screened in the town by the trees and houses. Besides the caves and abodes that had been constructed under the steep banks of the Klip River, where numbers lived, there were bomb-proof holes which had been dug by the people in their own gardens. General White had not shifted his headquarters, but continued to live near him in Mrs. W. Riley's house on the Poort Road. Until two weeks ago, notwithstanding the shelling, business went forward in most of the stores and shops as usual. He continued to supply meat to his customers, though the prices ran high—from tenpence to one shilling per pound for beef and mutton. Owing to the limited pasturage the cattle were becoming very thin. The military stock — horses and mules — fared rather better, for they received hay, oats, mealies, and bran. But that did not keep them quite fit, for the poor animals, to save them from shell-fire, were tethered all day long under the

banks of the Klip, where the rock or earth-bluff afforded ample protection. When watering-time came along in the morning, noon, and evening, the Boers latterly made desperate attempts to shell and kill the horses and mules. They were also trying to slaughter the grazing cattle in the same way. Throughout the siege not more than twenty people had been killed by all the thousands of Boer shells thrown into the town. In truth, the enemy's fire had done marvellously little damage, and, so far as the Boers and the bombardment were concerned, the garrison could hold out easily for another year and suffer little loss.

Mr. Thorrald further added that the positions held by our men are outside of those occupied just before the siege began. They have outposts on the hills beyond the old camp, known as the "tin camp," from its corrugated-iron huts. To the west of Poort Road they occupy the higher ridges, and on the east side the rough hills overlooking the town rifle-ranges and confronting Lombard's Kop. His house had a number of holes knocked in the roof with shell splinters, but, so far, not a shell had penetrated. Mrs. Riley's house had escaped almost intact, but others of his neighbours had fared badly from shell-fire. The Town Hall, which until recently sheltered the wounded and flew the Red Cross flags, was made a target of, apparently, by the Boer gunners. Two big shells had passed through the building; one of the missiles killed a

wounded soldier and injured six others lying in the cots. Our guns succeeded in putting one of the "Long Toms" upon Bulwan quite out of action, and another of the enemy's big guns was reported to have burst. There are, therefore, now fewer heavy ordnance vexing the town. All the flour and food-stuffs left in Ladysmith were some weeks ago commandeered by the military. Sir George White allows the bakers and butchers to trade, but on the condition that bread shall not exceed 4*d.* a 2-lb. loaf, nor meat 1*s.* a pound. There is no whiskey, beer, sugar, tinned milk, or other grocery dainties on sale in Ladysmith. The last bottle of common whiskey sold over the counter went for 12*s.* 6*d.* two weeks ago. At the same time a tin of condensed milk fetched 3*s.* Butter was unobtainable, and eggs—no questions asked as to date—6*s.* to 7*s.* a dozen. Cheese that required no string to lead it home, for it was strong enough to walk and follow, brought any price.

The conditions in Ladysmith at meal hours are very different from the comforting breakfasts, luncheons, and snacks one may have at any of the refreshment-rooms along the railway—say, for instance, that run at Estcourt, by Mr. Green, once footman to her Majesty the Queen. Two weeks ago also, the Boers planted a new "Long Tom" upon Mr. Bester's farm, west of Ladysmith, and from there began to pay attention to the troops on the west side of the town. Nearly all of the troops

have made for themselves rough shelters and "lean-tos," under which they lie safe from shell splinters, bullets, sun, and rain. The Gay Gordons, however, still cling to their tented camp, which is beneath the trees near the old fair-grounds. Shells drop amongst them, rip the canvas tents, and drop in unexpectedly between friends having a "crack," but, wondrous and true, they have hurt no one. On Joubert's return from his unsuccessful attempt to capture Estcourt, Mooi River, and besiege Maritzburg, dissensions broke out openly in the Boer camp. The Free Staters flatly declared that the siege of Ladysmith was a farce and a failure, and voted for returning home at once to defend their country from the British advance along the western border of Cape Colony. Things arrived at such a mutinous pass that it was determined by the Boer leaders to hold a council of war last Tuesday. The meeting took place upon Potgeiter's Farm, west of Ladysmith, and thither Joubert betook himself to persuade his confederates not to abandon Ladysmith and Natal. In passing through the Boer lines, Mr. Thorrald learned from Kaffirs that Joubert had only partially succeeded. The siege was to be maintained, but with less vigour, in hope to starve the garrison out by sickness and death. Meanwhile the majority of the force would go forward towards the Tugela to hold and destroy the relieving column. That the pinched Boers and their starveling horses might obtain better supplies,

a number of small raiding bands were to be sent south to loot cattle and provisions.

The fact of that course having been adopted was foreshadowed on Wednesday by the changes made in the enemy's dispositions around Colenso, and, further, by their advance across the Tugela. It is said that the commando east of Colenso is nearly 1000 strong, and is accompanied by from two to six guns. To return to Mr. Thorrald's narrative, the worst shells are fired from Lombard's Kop and the Bulwan—at least, their guns upon that side do most damage. In the big fight of November 9 we certainly put 600 of the enemy out of action. Our men deliberately held their fire and waited for the Boers to come closer. They came along early in the morning, thinking they had Ladysmith at their mercy. Never more will they attempt to carry the town by assault; they have had their lesson. To the Kaffirs they, of course, boast that they have killed all the best of our fighting men, and that those left have taken to holes, into which they cannot follow to turn them out. What is left, therefore, to be done, is to kill all the English horses and cattle, and raise such a stench in the place that the men will die or be forced to come out and surrender. They declare they have beaten England, and that she has no more soldiers to send on worth considering. Nay, it is hinted that her ships and country will soon be partitioned up among the nations friendly to the Boers, and there will be no more England.

To the neutral camp four miles south, and under the Bulwan, most of the non-combatants have gone, and the worst cases of sickness are sent for safety and rest to the same place. Over ten days ago we were all rejoiced to see the flashing of the electric light. The signals were easily read, until the Boers, who have electric searchlights in their camps, one at Besters and the other near the Bulwan, turned them on the beams from Estcourt or Frere. Our men, though, like the horses, a bit thin and jaded with constant watching, are very fit. Through being cooped up so closely—that is, men and animals—the town is in a very insanitary condition. The worst evil, however, is the impure water, which is beginning to cause sickness; but, so far, it is not of a severe type—mostly diarrhœa, mild cases of dysentery, and a little enteric fever. January is our worst month in Natal, and it will be well if the garrison is relieved before then. Efforts are being made to keep up the spirits of the men, of which there is little need, for they are all a lively lot. Every day when opportunity offers there is cricket and football, and the officers play polo quite regularly, joking if the Boer shell-fire interferes with the games. On Tuesday there was an athletic meeting of the soldiers. There were numerous prizes. The sports included foot-racing, as well as the usual contests, jumping, tug-of-war, etc. There was quite a large attendance of spectators.

General White has become much more popular

since the siege. It is believed that he was formerly held fast by orders from higher quarters to do nothing. But, even now, there are many who chafe at the prolonged sitting still, and are anxious to make a night assault, spike, or capture the enemy's guns, or go out by day and assail them with all arms. I feel certain that there are fully 20,000 Boers still round Ladysmith—nay, possibly 30,000 of them. We have plenty of ammunition and an abundance of supplies, of a kind, enough to last for months carefully used, so there is no fear of the result. The two weekly newspapers, made by pen and stylographic process, are still issued; both command a ready sale. Their names are the *Bombshell* and *Liar*. Each contains a front-page cartoon, one of the latest being that of Kruger and Steyn *en route* as prisoners to St. Helena.

CHAPTER XII

GENERAL BULLER'S ADVANCE

Chieveley Camp, December 13, 1899

At length the real forward movement for the relief of Ladysmith has commenced. General Sir Redvers Buller, V.C., commands in person. He is leading a force of 22,000 men, or thereabouts, to the help of Sir George White and those shut up with him. General Buller, by means of the electric searchlight signals, duly notified the Ladysmith garrison a few days ago that the advance and attack would be begun by a heavy bombardment of the Boer works erected upon the north of the Tugela. Yesterday (Tuesday), at daybreak, Major-General Barton's Union Fusilier Brigade occupied Chieveley —or, rather, the low ridges north of that railway-siding village. Barton's 6th Brigade includes the Royal Fusiliers, Scottish Fusiliers, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and the Irish Fusiliers. They quitted Frere before dawn and marched out eight miles to the new spot selected for encampment. Silently, in the dark, they got just so much nearer to Colenso and Lady

smith. With them proceeded a force of Colonial Cavalry, about 1000 strong, three field batteries, and a number of naval guns—12-pounders—and two 4.7 cannon under Captain Jones, of Her Majesty's ship *Forte*. It was confidently expected that the enemy would hasten to resist any attempt of our troops to settle down at Chieveley. Their big guns had previously shelled our reconnoitring cavalry at ranges much south of the place fixed upon for the new encampment. General Buller rode out very early and joined the advance column under Major-General Barton. To the surprise of many and the chagrin of some the Boers made no sign, and in no wise interfered with the operations of our troops. Without molestation from their cannon or rifles, the soldiers pitched their tents and the gunners posted their batteries, protecting them by temporary earth-works. The tents were raised behind a long low ridge, which screened the camp to some extent from the eyes of the enemy, looking down from Grobler's Kloof and the other ranges bordering the northern side of the Tugela, west of Colenso.

For a score of miles to east and west of Colenso the Boers have established posts and raised defences of various kinds—stone walls, trenches, and little emplacements for cannon. They watched us from valley and hilltop, but not a shot or shell did they vouchsafe to interfere with the purpose of the General, but left us severely alone. Doubtless their wish was to keep secret the exact location of their

rows of terraced trenches and batteries until our troops advanced to storm the ridges. Nay, they had even left the Tugela road bridge apparently intact, inviting our use of the structure, though they had blown up the railway girder bridge to the east of it. The bombardment of the Tugela heights was to have been begun at 9 a.m. at latest; but, the Boers showing no disposition to engage, it was found best to let well alone, and get things put to rights before beginning our cannonade. To test the strength of their determination to keep quiet until we attacked, cavalry and infantry were sent into the open, the troopers going down almost to the river bank. But these tactics failed to induce the wily Boers to disclose their strength and plan. The column, therefore, continued to make its position as secure as possible before beginning the bombardment of the enemy with lyddite and shrapnel. In the forenoon General Buller rode back to Frere, and the opening of the bombardment was postponed, provided circumstances did not rule otherwise, until this morning. Last night more troops, cavalry, guns, and infantry marched forward from Frere, some to join Barton's column, others to make a reconnaissance and demonstration to the westward, to Potgeiter's Drift, near Springfield. The Boers are to be kept, if possible, on tenter-hooks, running hither and thither to defend the river drifts for a day or so, until we are ready to break through and seize the north banks of the Tugela.

With flash of flame, deep roar and thud, as the outburst of a volcano, at 6.40 this morning the big naval guns, the long 47-pounders, began the bombardment. Lyddite shell after shell was sent hurtling among the enemy's works, causing those lying hidden, who escaped uninjured from the violent explosions, to bob out like rabbits from their holes and scamper rearward. For all their cunning, we had found out exactly where their guns and trenches were, just as we also knew that the roadway bridge was undermined with dynamite and connected by electric wires ready to be blown into the air if our troops had been foolish enough to attempt to pass across before we cut the connecting wires. The 12-pounders manned by the bluejackets soon joined in the attack, and the Boers could be seen gathering upon the ridges, beyond range of shell-fire, watching the effect of our cannonading. General Buller remained in Frere Camp, busily completing his arrangements for the change of camps, which takes place to-night. The General and Staff leave probably for Springfield at 4 a.m. As for the remainder of the guns and the Regular Cavalry—the "Royals" (1st Dragoons) and the 13th Hussars—they set out this afternoon from Frere to assist in the impending turning movement. The country beyond the Tugelas is "open going," *viâ* Acton Homes, straight into Ladysmith. It is hoped that they will be able to effect a junction with Sir George White, and operate upon the flank and rear of the Free State

Boers, cutting off their line of retreat to Van Reenan's and the passes through the "Berg" south of Harrismith.

It was found that, great as is the range of the naval 4.7 gun, the enemy standing upon Grobler's Kloof could not be reached, even at ranges over that for which the weapon is sighted. A party of thirty or forty Boers, to the east of Colenso, who took shelter under the Tugela bank, dashed out and galloped away uphill when a shell burst in the river-bed near them. At 10.15 a.m. the order was given to cease firing, and the bombardment was concluded for the day. Shortly thereafter small groups of Boers ventured down from their eeries to see what damage the shells had done, and to assist wounded friends. One of the trenches was partially destroyed, a Boer gun was knocked over, and a tent was blown into rags by our fire. During the time the action was proceeding at Chieveley, there was the echo of the bombardment going on at Ladysmith. To-day most of the firing seemed to be done by our own people, who had brisked up greatly since the arrival of General Buller and the promise of speedy relief. As late as the night of the 10th, 500 of the 60th (the K.R.R.), under Lieut.-Colonel Metcalfe, made a night attack upon one of the Boer positions. The Rifles succeeded in getting hold of a 47-pounder howitzer, which has a great range, and breaking it up with dynamite, Lieutenant Digby Jones, R.E.,

superintending that part of the achievement. The enemy tried to cut off the retreat of the Rifles, but, using their bayonets, they broke a way through. Our losses were one officer and ten men killed, and about forty wounded. It is stated that the Boers lost much more heavily in both attacks.

CHAPTER XIII

HUMOUR BY HELIO

Chieveley Camp, December 13, 1899

Camps are not exempt from life's little ironies. We have had our full share at Estcourt and Frere. Although General Buller has been in Natal so long, and the fact is more than common property, extending to Boer knowledge, not a word have we correspondents been permitted to say in our wires about that distinguished officer. To some extent, I fancy, General Buller is himself responsible, for he dislikes notoriety, Press or otherwise; and possibly would prefer, like others one wots of, to confine the chronicle of the campaign to official bulletins. But even a distinguished General, like other people of eminence, owes something in the way of sacrifice to himself and the public, whom we all serve. On two occasions within the last few days we correspondents have been prevented from going forward with the cavalry. The first was when a reconnaissance was made towards Colenso, General Buller

himself moving out with the force. Instance number two was yesterday, when Major-General Barton's column advanced and occupied Chieveley. In each case Press correspondents were, "by order," stopped at the Frere Camp picquet lines. It happened, as it nearly always does on these occasions, that, as if to mark the extreme ridiculousness of the whole proceeding, unauthorized Pressmen and civilian onlookers were present with the troops. That may or may not be the fault of the picquets in allowing strangers and others to pass without challenge, whilst rigidly stopping all the better-known correspondents. It is like the reputation, almost a matter of habit, which the cable companies are acquiring of invariably breaking down on the eve of important events. Anybody can recall several instances within the last three months.

Most of the correspondents felt so sore over yesterday's embargo, although on neither that nor the prior occasion did the enemy fire a shot, that they decided on meeting to raise a formal protest. Here is the colour and form their action took :—

To Lieut.-General Sir C. F. Clery, *etc.*

"Military Camp, Frere, Natal,
"Tuesday, December 12, 1899.

"Sir,—The licensed correspondents with this force respectfully desire to draw your attention to

what they consider to be a great hardship to them, and to the interests they serve.

"On two occasions—one recently, and the other to-day—we have been debarred from accompanying the troops, although in both instances there was a great likelihood that an action would ensue. The hardship is the greater in that while we were stopped at the picquet, civilian visitors in camp, correspondents' cyclist servants, and others, have been permitted to accompany the troops afield.

"We ask that, as licensed correspondents, who are subject to an active censorship, and as gentlemen honestly seeking to do our duty, we be permitted to discharge those functions for which we have been commissioned.

"Very respectfully,

"Your obedient servants."

(Signed by nearly all of the correspondents.)

We were given to understand that to-day that restriction would be withdrawn. It was pointed out by myself and another—an American journalist—deputed to lay the matter before General Clery, that the invidious distinction made was as if we were suspected of being likely to play the part of spies upon the army. Our contention was that we should be trusted at least as much as outsiders, or sent away from camp. I am bound to confess that the Generals have a real grievance—or, rather, had—in the matter of the publication of news, for

certain of the Colonial journals were wont to give in print matters of as much interest, or more, to the enemy than to friends at home.

With customary cuteness, for "all is fair (supposed to be) in love and war," there have been attempts made to humbug the Boers. Simple as they are, they have not always had the worst of that game. Witness their answer to our messages, and tricks to make it impossible for the Ladysmith people to read the signals flashed to them. For example, at Mooi River, a week or so ago, one of our heliographers asked the enemy, "Are you Boers?" "Yes," was the reply. "Where are you going?" was our next question. "To Maritzburg," was the answer flashed back. "Then God help you!" was the response. "We hope and think He will," came the answer, for your Boer is a fervent hypocrite. Yesterday, from Chieveley, they kept flashing our troops, without provocation, to "Go to H—l!" When, at last, notice was taken of them, and they were asked, "In what strength are you?" their response was appropriate, "Come and see."

Here are three, not code but open messages flashed to Ladysmith within the past week by the electric searchlight apparatus, for which we have solely to thank our naval officers. In the matter of long-range guns, as well as searchlights, the initiative has come from Captain Scott and other officers of that ancient branch. Just now they are further

adding to the debt due to them by the Army, by the construction of a railroad waggon for transporting and firing a 6-inch gun. No doubt, had the Army officers known earlier that the Navy could and would gladly rig up such useful contrivances for land service as searchlights and long-range field cannon, they would have early in the day made requisition for these valuable adjuncts of modern warfare. It is suggestive of our too conservative tendencies in certain matters that the enemy should have at first been ahead of us in long-range cannon and electric search-lighting. An openly flashed signal which the Boers must have been able to read last night was :—

"BULLER *to* WHITE.—I shall start the attack by a bombardment."

Other communications designed to fall under their observation were :—

"*To* SIR GEORGE WHITE, *Ladysmith.*—We hear from Methuen that his advance to Kimberley is a great success. Boers telling awful lies about their losses, which have been heavy. We buried about eighty-one at Belmont, where they say that they lost twelve.—BULLER."

"*To* HON. CHARLES FORTESCUE, *Ladysmith.*—Bungo is bringing a Beecham, as a relief. Lyttelton and staff send best wishes to Fortescue and Staff."

The Boers are very fond of flashing rude signals by helio whenever they can catch sight of our signallers.

There are now said to be 15,000 Boers, under Commandant Botha, in position along their Colenso lines, and fully as many more around Ladysmith. Where have all their numbers come from, it may be asked? At first I estimated that both Republics could put between 35,000 and 40,000 men in the field. That calculation did not take into full consideration impressed foreigners resident in either of the States, Colonial renegades from the Cape and Natal, nor foreign mercenaries. Still, allowing for all these added numbers, I gravely question if the Boers have, or can have had, more than 55,000 men in the field. The fact that they are as yet, by means of their railroads, able to move upon interior lines, as well as their own inherent mobility, enables them to make one man count for two against any force of infantry. To-morrow all four infantry brigades—Major-Generals Hildyard's, Lyttelton's, FitzRoy Hart's, and Barton's—will be ready for the attack upon Botha's Boers. The enemy have turned a naturally strongly defensible position into a line of fortresses. If the cavalry —who march out to-night, and strike direct towards Springfield—manage to seize and hold Zwart's Kop, the Boer lines will be turned and their retreat homeward menaced. Botha's main laager is reported to be near Onderbrook Spruit, whence they hope to rush to repel any attack upon their works, be it at Colenso or westward of that place. In the course of to-morrow afternoon or Friday the engagement

that should free Ladysmith and drive the Boers in a rout to the north will be fought, and, all going well, fairly won. But speculation is idle. We may and probably shall lose many men if the enemy really give us a stand-up fight. Yet the result must be the re-opening of communication with Sir George White. Thereafter, I take it, General Buller will hasten back to Cape Colony, and, possibly, a number of the troops here may be re-transported there also, for the final march upon Bloemfontein and Pretoria. Whilst General Buller moves to relieve Ladysmith the line of communications will be held by various detached bodies of troops. The medical arrangements are such that, in addition to field hospitals, two ambulance trains are provided to carry down the sick and wounded from the field to Frere, Estcourt, and Maritzburg, and also to the hospital ships in Durban.

One man, a Boer deserter, who gives the name of Carlisle, came in from Colenso. He, with one or two others, had been sent to lay the dynamite cases for further wrecking Colenso railway bridge. The enemy having seen what, as they thought, was the rapid way Frere bridge was repaired, determined to blow away all the piers and abutments of the Colenso structure. Carlisle sent one of his mates to buy some things from a coolie — or, at least, take a sack of potatoes. When the men were gone he jumped upon a horse and rode in to here. Carlisle's story is that the Boers acknowledge

they are unable to take Ladysmith by assault, but, at the same time, they express themselves as confident of preventing Buller's relieving the garrison. Carlisle's mother was Dutch, and his father English. So much were he and other British burghers suspected, that the commandants insisted on keeping them near their quarters, and placing at times a guard over them, with orders to shoot any attempting to desert. He further declares that numbers of the Boers have no horses, the animals having died from hard usage. Forage among them was scarce, but provisions for the men were plentiful, though lacking in variety. Many of the Free State Boers, he added, were anxious to return home, but the majority were for fighting. That same Saturday afternoon the Boers destroyed a few more of the piers of Colenso railway bridge.

Sunday, December 10, was, as usual, quiet. We had the usual church parades for Divine service, and no doubt the Boers held their psalm-chanting conventicles, where there is more measure than melody. On Monday, December 11, Frere Camp was further augmented by the arrival of fresh troops from Estcourt. Major-General Lyttelton's and Barton's were among the last of the infantry to arrive. The last of the cavalry, the 13th Hussars, came in yesterday afternoon.

We heard, as usual, the matutinal roar of the Ladysmith bombardment, and from the ridges beyond Frere saw the occasional flash and columns

of smoke from the Boer guns upon the Bulwan Mountain. In the afternoon a long dark line of natives, numbering several hundreds, came at a swinging gait down the slopes from Estcourt way. They were Zulu "boys," mostly ex-labourers from the Rand. As they came along singing in loud, stirring chorus their war-songs, they brandished their knobkerries in cadence with the rhythm. They have been engaged with many more to lighten the soldiers' labours of unloading and loading railway trucks, road waggons, and clearing up camp rubbish. A sensible and timely act has been their employment by General Buller, for in South Africa the soldier has plenty of other hard tasks apart from the ordinary fatigue duties. In this land of abundant black, unskilled, menial labour, it was one of the things I thought terribly out of place in Ladysmith, to see honest "Tommies" set to washing and scrubbing floors with carbolic soap, and doing rough camp chores, whilst crowds of idle and public-paid coolies and negroes wandered about the streets. Yesterday (Tuesday, December 12) Major Stuart Wortley came up from Durban and Maritzburg with 1200 Uitlanders, who have been enrolled to serve as stretcher-bearers. The men are a likely set of fellows. They wear their own clothes, their distinguishing badge being a red cross on a white band worn round the arm. To each of the four infantry brigades 300 of them have been assigned to follow the troops afield.

Latest (*Wednesday*).—Are the Boers trekking, or do they mean to stay and give us battle? The idea now seems to be that we may, after all, give them an infantry battle at or near Colenso, and clear the ridges there of the enemy, whilst the cavalry—our own and White's—looks after cutting into the routed, flying Boers. All the preparations have been made for a stirring battle. General Buller visited the correspondents' camp this afternoon, and, unreservedly, as his wont, put the case *re* the correspondents to me. He reminded me that we have undertaken not to proceed beyond the outposts without express permission. Personally, he wished us to see everything, and he would not have been averse to our accompanying the reconnaissance the other day or the column which left for Chieveley yesterday; but he did object to correspondents moving about at any time by themselves, or wandering out and in from camp to camp. There was and could be no objection to correspondents who obtained the permission of the leaders of any column or force accompanying that body. The unwarranted passage given to servants and non-combatants came under the category of the "two blacks which don't make a white." A correspondent had already gone outside the picquets, been captured, and, as the enemy refused to regard him as non-belligerent, had asked to be exchanged as an officer. That sort of thing was what he wished to avert, or a repetition of such

an occurrence. The correspondents who have had the matter placed before them have cordially accepted the explanation, and empowered me to thank Sir Redvers Buller for his courtesy; and that I have done by letter.

CHAPTER XIV

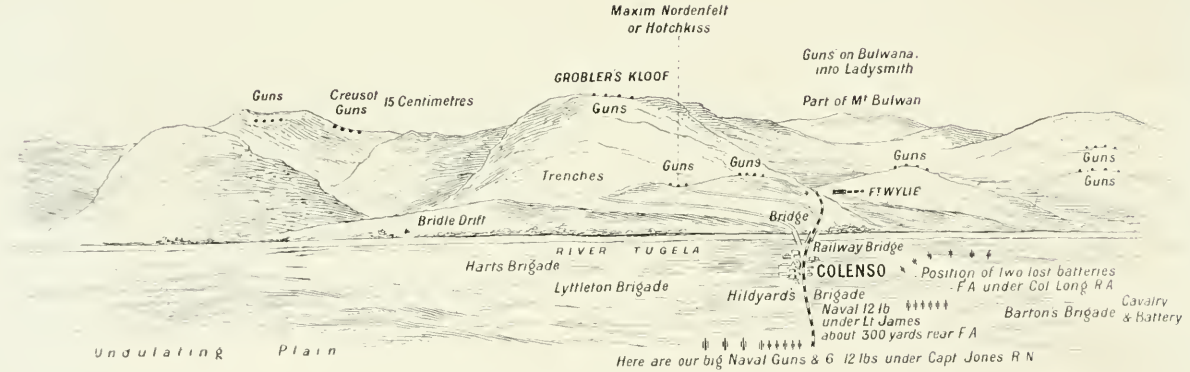
BATTLE OF TUGELA RIVER—HOW GENERAL BULLER'S PLANS MISCARRIED

Camp, North Chieveley, Sunday, December 17, 1899

THERE is courage and merit in openly speaking the truth about any engagement, for only thereby can be had clearer knowledge, higher efficiency of service, and sterner resolution. On Friday last the Ladysmith Relief Column, under General Sir Redvers Buller, attacked the Boers with all arms. It was the biggest, the most severe and inconclusive battle of the war. The enemy held an exceedingly strong position north of Colenso, their camps there being connected by chains of laagers and outposts with those encircling Ladysmith upon its southern side. A little way north of the banks of the Tugela stretches an extensive range of bold, lofty ridges trending east and west. These walls of trap and sandstone rocks command the river and valley lands and the little angular foot-hills lying near the river. Southward of Colenso from the Tugela to Estcourt is a wide, treeless area—a sort of South African

downs—of low, smoothly rounded uplands, sparsely covered with grass. Naturally difficult of access, the Boers for weeks past, by means of every device known to military engineers, had so strengthened the position as to make it almost unassailable except at terrible risk and cost. Barbed wire was laid, walls and forts constructed and cleverly planned, and trenches were dug in every direction. Add to these, excellent modern artillery and magazine rifles in the hands of capable foemen, and some idea may be formed of the task our Generals had before them. True, much of what is here set out was only learned when the plunge was made, and the ability to eliminate error belongs to none.

Like a great barrier across the nearest and best highways to Ladysmith by rail and road, the Boer lines interposed between our determined General and his goal. Upon us has almost invariably devolved the burden of attacking. Even where it has been otherwise, the Boers have generally managed to secure positions from which we had to drive them. General Buller resolved to try and break through the Colenso lines, for time also was an element in the situation. Plans were prepared and orders were issued under Sir Redvers' instructions by Lieut.-General Sir Francis Clery for thrusting aside the enemy. In these cases it is usually best to let the military authorities speak for themselves, and I therefore quote from the General Orders of the day.



FIRST FRONTAL ATTACK ON COLENSO.

"*Orders of* LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR FRANCIS CLERY, *commanding the South Natal Field Forces.*

"Chieveley, December 14, 1899 (10 p.m.)

"FIRST.

"The enemy is entrenched in the kopjes north of the Tugela; one large camp is reported to be near the Ladysmith road, about five miles north-west of Colenso. Another large camp is reported in the hills which lie off the Tugela in a northerly direction from Hlangwane Hill—a rough scrub-covered kopje.

"SECOND.

"It is the intention of the General Officer commanding to force a passage of the Tugela to-morrow.

"THIRD.

"The 5th Brigade (Major-General Hart's) will move from its present camp at 4.30 a.m., and march towards Bridle Drift (a ford about four miles west of Colenso), immediately west of the junction of Doornkop Spruit and the Tugela. The brigade will cross at this point, and, after crossing, move along on the left bank of the river towards the kopjes north of the iron bridge.

"FOURTH.

"The 2nd Brigade (Major-General Hildyard's) will move from its present camping-ground at 4 a.m.,

and, passing south of the present camping-ground of No. 1 and No. 2 of the divisional troops, will march in the direction of the iron bridge at Colenso, and the brigade will cross at this point and gain possession of the kopjes north of the iron bridge.

"FIFTH.

"The 4th Brigade (Major-General the Hon. N. G. Lyttelton's) will advance at 4.30 a.m. to the point between Bridle Drift and the railway south, and can support either the 5th or the 2nd Brigade.

"SIXTH.

"The 6th Brigade (Major-General Barton's), less half a battalion as escort to the baggage, will move at 4 a.m. east of the railway in the direction of Hlangwane Hill, to a position where it can protect the right flank of the 2nd Brigade, and, if necessary, support it or the mounted troops referred to later as moving towards Hlangwane Hill.

"SEVENTH.

"The officer commanding the mounted brigade (the Earl of Dundonald) will move at 4 a.m. with a force of 1000 men and one battery, No. 1 Brigade Division, in the direction of Hlangwane Hill. He will cover the right flank of the general movement, and will endeavour to take up a position on Hlangwane Hill, where he will enfilade the kopjes north of the iron bridge. The officer commanding the

mounted troops will also detail two forces of 300 and 500 men, to cover the right and left flanks respectively and protect the baggage.

"EIGHTH.

"The 2nd Brigade Division of the Royal Field Artillery will move at 4.30 a.m., following the 4th Brigade, and will take up a position whence it can enfilade the kopjes north of the iron bridge. The 6th Brigade (Major-General Barton's) will act on any orders it receives from Major-General Hart. The six naval guns—12-pounders—now in position north of the 4th Brigade, will advance on the right of the 2nd Brigade Division Royal Field Artillery. No. 1 Division Royal Field Artillery, less one battery detached to the mounted brigade, will move at 3.30 a.m. east of the railway, and proceed, under cover of the 6th Brigade, to a point from which it can prepare a crossing for the 2nd Brigade. The six naval guns will accompany and act with the Brigade Division.

"NINTH.

"As soon as the troops mentioned in the preceding paragraph have moved to their position, the remaining units and the baggage will be parked in deep formation in five separate lines, facing north, in rear of to-day's artillery position."

Most of the parentheses are mine. There are other details given in the General Order, but enough

has been quoted to enable a fairer judgment being framed between expectation and performance. What will strike nearly everybody who reads further is, that the portions of the programme left to Major-Generals Hart, Barton, and the Earl of Dundonald by some mischance were not completed in accordance with the general plan. The field batteries also failed to render the expected help to the assaulting infantry. Each soldier carried 150 rounds of ball cartridges. Beyond these and his great-coat Tommy went into the fight in the lightest marching order, and unquestionably eager to engage hand-to-hand. General Buller had his headquarters nominally beside the two 4.7-inch naval guns, which were firing lyddite. As a matter of fact, he and his escort of mounted police rode everywhere where the roar and briskness of the battle seemed most to demand his personal supervision. There is a preliminary scene or two that must be limned, for that will help to the better unfolding of the drama of Colenso.

On Thursday all General Buller's column, consisting of four brigades of infantry, nearly two brigades of cavalry—including Volunteers—six Royal Artillery field batteries, sixteen naval guns, a big Royal Engineer pontoon-train, with other branches of the Queen's Service, totalling 23,000 men, were encamped upon the open veldt some three miles north of Chieveley Railway-station. The majority of the troops quitted Frere Camp before day-break, and had comfortably ridden or tramped the

intervening eight or nine miles. Major-General Barton's Union Fusilier Brigade had, however, occupied part of the intended new camp site the previous day. Along the stone ridge west of the railway was the centre and key of Chieveley Camp. There we were less than 5000 yards south of Colenso and the Tugela. The puffing clouds of smoke and dull roar from Mount Bulwan showed that Ladysmith was still being materially bombarded. Before us loomed dark and large, Grobler's Hill, and the continuous ranges, foreground of meadow, brown ridges, and background of hills, were scored with serried lines of Boer trenches punctuated by forts. Upon the right, crowning the rounded shoulder of a reddish foothill, was Fort Wylie, a small redoubt built before Colenso was evacuated. That, as well as their new works, was in occupation by the enemy. With characteristic astuteness the Boers were chary of disclosing their whereabouts. We knew that they had numerous camps behind the hills, and were in force before us. Occasionally a few horsemen could be seen cantering swiftly over the plain or making up the hill-tracks. Later on, in scattered twos and threes, they galloped furiously to get under cover of the hills and to reinforce their firing-lines in the trenches. Small groups also could be caught sight of, through good glasses, watching our movements from the remote hilltops. There was a belief entertained by not a few, but which I did not share, that the enemy would decline battle. The

advantages were too much in their favour for that course; besides, they would have time and space enough to run away when they were likely to be more closely pressed. Nothing in the course of the war has dimmed the keenness of officers and men. Undoubtedly their hearts are in the task set them.

Thursday broke raw and cold. The weather has made more than fervent tropical amends since. Never, with the usual exaggeration of oldest inhabitants, has there been such sweltering weather during December in Natal. The pastures and rivers are as dried up as in June. It was difficult to locate the more elaborate and strongly occupied works of the Boers. We had given them a taste of our gun-metal on Wednesday, but for Thursday was reserved an ample banquet served up by the two 4.7-inch and the 12-pounder naval guns. As soon as the light was good enough the bombardment was begun. General Buller had signalled to General White that his attack upon Colenso lines should be the prelude to the advance upon Ladysmith. Captain Jones, of her Majesty's ship *Forte*, with part of the naval contingent, began shelling Commandant Botha's, the Boer leader's, works. The air crackled with the stunning roar of guns and exploding shells. Heavy and steady was the cannonade of the sailors. The enemy had made no attempt to check our advance or the pitching of the tents for our new camp, although we were well within the range of their Krupp and big Creusot cannon. The Boers "lay"

low. Not a word or shot did they return us. A few of our scouts, who, in the early morning, had ridden close to the Tugela, had been fired upon by their riflemen. When the bombardment started numbers of our men watched and criticised the effect of our shells as the lyddite missiles struck rock or work with resounding impact. They threw up enormous columns of smoke and dust. Not more than three shots had been fired from the big guns when the Boers promptly suspended all trenching operations, hurrying off towards the hills or burrowing in their most secure cover.

At noon our bombardment was stopped until 3 p.m. From that hour it went forward in a slow, intermittent fashion, until nightfall. With more guns, a heavy and systematic searching by lyddite fire could—and, perhaps, should—have been made of the Boer ground in front. During the cannonade the enemy were seen to be trying to place a large cannon near Fort Wylie, which is the nearest foothill across the Tugela bridge. A shell or two led to the total suspension of that operation. Nearly 140 shells were pitched on Thursday by the naval guns at the Boer lines. We learned that same day that over five of the enemy's bridge guards had been killed on Wednesday by one of our lyddite shells. The heavier bombardment of Thursday must have accounted for many more, but not a shot in reply did the wily Boers vouchsafe us. They took their punishment, biding their

opportunity. One thing proximity disclosed was that the Boers' favourite position for placing their cannon is in or near a dip or neck between hills. They also arrange to shift to and fro with their lighter guns. Another trick of theirs, to prevent their heads being seen above the skyline, is to have their trenches in front of the earth thrown out in digging.

All was in readiness in the camps of the left column before daylight on Friday. What with packing baggage and making ready, there had been few hours left for rest to officers and men. Sleep, even in campaign clothes and boots, by order, is not always possible. Away to the east of the railway went the cavalry, under Lord Dundonald, and several of the batteries. Hart's Fusiliers went off to the west, the Irishmen as gay and as pleased as Punch to be in the van. With them also were field-guns and cavalry. I think the 13th Hussars were on the right (east) and the Royals on the left; but neither of the crack regiments had much beyond the part of lookers-on to play that day. General Hildyard, who is always steady and to be relied upon, had the post of honour, the attack upon the centre, where the Boer works were nearest and strongest; and, with the Queen's Own on the right of the railway, and the Devons from Chieveley on the left of the metals, he advanced leisurely. The men were in open order, eight paces or so apart, and moved onward with perfect dressing—almost too perfect for the job on hand. Behind the West Surrey, or Queen's,

in support, were part of the West Yorks, whilst the Devons had the East Surrey in rear. Major-General Hart made his *détour* in advance towards Bridle Drift in closer formation; indeed, his men were caught under fire in quarter column and column of route, or something like it. Lord Dundonald made a wide circuit to get upon the slopes of the rough hills which run north towards Pieter's Crossing, and expose the flanks of the Colenso lines. With him was most of the Colonial Cavalry. I went forward, in the first instance, to the big guns, then towards Hart's brigade, keeping up on the high ground, then back past the guns towards Colenso. Our front extended for fully six miles, not including the cavalry flankers.

The action was begun shortly before 6 a.m. by the naval contingent firing lyddite and 12-pounders. Heavily did they pound the trenches upon their front—Grobler's Hill, and the lesser ridges from Fort Wylie northward—but not an answer came back from the Boers. Forward proceeded our infantry, whilst the Natal Carbineers, South African Light Horse, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, and the "Kings" Mounted Infantry, advanced to occupy Hlangwane Hill. Major-General Hildyard's Queen's and Devons were nearing the platelayers' and other outlying houses of Colenso. Colonels Long and Hunt had come into line with their three field batteries, and Lieutenant James, R.N., with his six long naval 12-pounders, was doing his best with

ox-waggons to range alongside of them. Major-General Barton's brigade, on the right of Hildyard's, was doing nothing in particular, with the exception of part of the Scottish and Irish Fusiliers, who got, later on, well into the heat of the fray. The field batteries upon Hildyard's right might have been moving down the Long Valley, Aldershot, so excellently were they aligned over the downward slopes. They rumbled towards the timber-fringed bank of the Tugela, half a mile or more east of Colenso. Colonel Long was determined his guns should not be outclassed, and was, with too great hardihood, bringing them within 1500 yards of Fort Wylie. Indeed, he outpaced the infantry escort.

At 6.25 a.m. suddenly there burst an awful crash of Boer musketry upon the batteries and advancing infantry, Devons and Queen's. The rattle of Mausers swelled, and was maintained as one continuous roar from within 600 yards. From buildings and lines of trenches south of the river, and from the river bank itself, the Boers fired at our gunners and footmen; and from trenches on the northern side of the Tugela, and from Fort Wylie and elsewhere they sent out a hurricane of leaden hail. The bullets venomously rained upon the ground in all directions, raising puffs of dust, and tearing the air with shrill sounds. It seemed impossible that anything could face and live in that fire. Few have ever seen so heavy and deadly a fusillade; but neither the British gunners nor infantry hesitated or winced. The

cannon were wheeled into position, although many horses and men were shot down ere the manœuvre was completed. Our indomitable soldiers walked erect and straight onward. Not Rome in her palmiest days ever possessed more devoted sons. As the gladiators marched proud and beaming to meet death, so the British soldiers doomed to die saluted, and then, and with alacrity, stepped forward to do their duty—glory or the grave. I, like hundreds more, am eager to proclaim that Tommy Atkins is a far grander hero than ninety-nine hundredths of the people in England have any conception of. Rough, it is true, he may be, but the stuff that makes for empires and for greatness fills his every vein and heart-beat. Anglo-Saxon soldiers always advance in that way. I asked an American, who had seen warfare at home in Cuba and Manila, if his own countrymen generally did. He answered, "Yes; it is marvellous, but wasteful." Perhaps there may be occasions when the sight of men coming on so steadily in the face of almost certain death, will try the nerves of their antagonists; but my own view is that, save where men have to get to within running distance of a few lines of trenches, the system of rushes from cover to cover by small squads is far less wasteful of life. Closer and closer walked the soldiers to the Boer trenches. Our men managed to get within 400 yards of the nearest rifle-pits; lying down, they then returned the fire; but there was little or nothing to be seen

to aim at, for the enemy kept themselves carefully hidden behind trees, in trenches, or behind walls. Unfortunately, it had not been suspected that the Boers had ventured to construct cover upon the south side of the river.

With magnificent courage Long and Hunt fought their guns, shelling the ridges across the Tugela for over an hour. Fort Wylie and the adjacent stony crest were swept with shrapnel; but the Boer fire from other coigns of vantage grew in volume during the temporary pacification by shell of Fort Wylie. The Mausers did their work all too well, and gradually two of Long's batteries were put out of action; but not before he and Hunt had been wounded, as well as most of the officers and men. The horses had been shot down, and the others brought up to retire the guns shared their fate. Happily, the naval battery and the third field battery were able to withdraw to a safer position.

Meanwhile, the Devons and the Queen's had driven the Boers out of the platelayers' and other houses, and had managed to clear the enemy out of Colenso village. Several of the Boer trenches had also been carried; the enemy, as usual, bolting when Tommy got near with gun and bayonet. Backwards and forwards wove the shuttle of death from the trenches covering the low ground and foot-hills and the walled crests across the Tugela. The enemy's lines were crowded with riflemen, and the flash and puff of musketry ran ever up and

down their front. Our naval guns in the centre, helped now in a desultory way by others, hammered away at the Boer trenches. Five minutes after they opened with their rifles, the enemy's gunners followed suit with half a score of cannon. Our infantry and batteries were ploughed with 6-inch Creusot shells, lesser Krupps, and the aggravating rat-a-tat-tat of the 1-pounder Maxims and Hotchkiss machine-cannon. Ah! I should have added that, for it was part of the hurricane of iron and lead our infantry and gunners dauntlessly faced and advanced against. What wonder that all who saw the soldiers' heroism were enthusiastic in their admiration of Tommy!

I turn from Hildyard, who has got forward to the bank of the Tugela, has men in Colenso, and has seen a few of our reckless youngsters set foot by the ruined iron highway bridge, to Hart's Brigade. The Irish Brigade, through no fault of the men's, were somewhat late. Possibly the map was wrongly drawn upon which Major-General Hart based his plans. At any rate, where he thought was the main river, only a bewildering spruit interposed. Down towards the salient, so to speak, of the Boer trenches and works he led his men as if on parade, far within possible, and, as it unfortunately turned out, actual point-blank range of the enemy's Mausers, in close formation. The brigade had a withering fire poured into them and their accompanying cavalry and batteries.

Long had outstripped his escort; Hart had taken everybody with him. Then the brigade strove to deploy, and Hart actually is said to have got markers out to see that was done by book! The Boers promptly helped their Mausers with artillery, big and little, and our batteries and cavalry had to hurry to the rear to secure better ground. A further swing to the left was made by the Irish Brigade; and General Lyttelton, who admirably handled his men throughout, keeping them in open order, pushed on a little way to lend support. Consumed with wrath, the Dublin and Inniskilling Fusiliers hurried forward, backed by the Connaught Rangers and the Border Regiment. They soon got to grips with the Boers. Swift and straight, they swept down through the long grass into the dongas towards the Tugela.

It was about 7 a.m. With as fierce and prolonged a rifle-fire as had greeted Hildyard's Brigade, the Irishmen had to deal. Down upon them also descended 100-pounder shells from the lofty hill west of Grobler's. With jibe and cheer they pushed for the river, and the enemy fell away before them or were killed in their trenches by the smart shots of the Dublin boys. Five hundred yards of Boer trenches were passed over, and Buller himself watched them the while with admiration. The General, however, was recalled to Hildyard's Brigade with the news that the enemy from the river banks, which he held in large

numbers, was slating the batteries and the Second Brigade. The battle proceeded with undiminished fury; yet, as in all big actions, there were those unaccountable and strange lulls, when the sound of conflict drifted into silence, the birds took up their songs, and one made note that the sun was still shining peacefully. Rifles and cannon were cooling, and men were sitting tight, taking breath.

From 8 a.m. until 11 a.m. the fight was general and fiercest all along the line. Hildyard and Hart's Brigades had respectively suffered long before that hour, but the later hours had heavier trials for all. The Colonial Cavalry had advanced to Hlangwane, to find the Boers in strength there before them. Nay, they had guns in position upon that rough hill and the larger range behind. Truly, the wings or flanks of a Boer army are in the air, and it is well-nigh hopeless to attempt to turn their flanks, so much do they gain by their extreme mobility and intimate knowledge of the country. To get at them, keep at them, and drive them—as at Eland's Laagte—appear the safest tactics. An hour of Brigadier Hector Macdonald would have made a difference in the turning movements that failed. The Colonials fought bravely at Hlangwane, and even without the support they might have counted upon from Lord Dundonald and General Barton—but did not get either timely or generously, or indeed at all—came nigh winning with their own hands the position. Why they were not helped I am unable

at the moment to say, or to afford an explanation. What I do know is that they won their way under a sharp rifle-fire almost to the summit, and the enemy admitted that the position was all but gained. Regretfully, too, do I add, that the battery was not able to render them much assistance. They were ordered down, and Hlangwane was abandoned to the Boers, with the result that the Colonials suffered more in retreat than in the advance. The same fate, but to a lesser extent, also befell the infantry when later on they fell back to camp.

By 7.15 a.m. the Irish Brigade had driven the Boers to the north bank of the Tugela. They found that the enemy had planted the ground with barbed-wire entanglements. Even in the bed of the river barbed wire had been laid. Down into the water went the Dublins, Inniskillings, Borderers, and Connaughts. It was found there was no drift or ford. The Boers had cunningly dammed the river, and there was ten feet of water where it was ordinarily but knee-deep. They strove to find crossings, and many a fine fellow, with his weight of ammunition and accoutrements, was drowned. It was a desperate and serious situation. The attack upon the right was making no progress, and Hart's men had reached an apparent impasse ; but there were furious, angry Irishmen, who resolved to get across somehow by dint of scrambling from rock to rock and swimming. A number won the other side, yet most found that they had but passed

across a winding spruit. The Tugela still lay in front, and all the while the murderous fire of cannon and Mausers crashed, and comrades fell weltering in blood. Our naval guns did their best to silence the enemy's cannon, but the Boer gunners devoted their attention almost exclusively to slaughtering our cavalry, field artillery, and infantry. Not more than a dozen shots were fired at Captain Jones's central battery, yet it was well within range. To conceal the position of their cannon was evidently an ever-present desire of the enemy ; but the sailors did catch sight of one or two of the Boer cannon, and managed effectually to silence them. Several of the lyddite shells made magnificent hits, and one blew up a Creusot gun near Grobler's Kloof. Another broke down the parapet of Fort Wylie, clearing an opening big enough to drive two Fleet Street omnibuses abreast. In these and other instances nearly all the enemy in the vicinity of the works must have been killed or maimed.

Matters were at their worst about 10 a.m. Daring spirits of the Irish Brigade had got across the Tugela, only to find lines upon lines of trenches before them or a wide network of wire entanglement. Colenso was in our occupation. The Queen's, and others of the Second Brigade, with a few of Barton's, chiefly the Scottish Fusiliers, were quite near the iron bridge and the river. Regardless of the wildest fusillade ever heard from an enemy, our men tried to bore in farther.

Generals Buller and Clery, with their Staffs and escort, had ridden near the lost guns, and subsequently went towards the platelayers' houses. The spouting hail of lead and iron snapped and spluttered; dust puffed more than ever. Lord Roberts' son, Lieutenant Roberts, K.R.R., with Captains Schofield and Congreve, of the Staff, volunteered to ride out and endeavour to save the two field batteries in the open. Readily other volunteers were found. Corporals from the linesmen and drivers of the ammunition-waggons, taking spare teams, galloped out, and men and horses again began falling on every side. Young Roberts' horse was blown up with a shell, which inflicted severe wounds upon his body and limbs. Congreve was hit in the leg with a bullet, and his clothes cut by other missiles. Schofield alone escaped untouched across that valley of death. Quickly the surviving animals were rounded up, the guns hooked, and dragged away. Again and again that day were attempts made to haul off the remaining guns, which belonged to the 14th and 66th Field Batteries; but the Boer cannon and rifle-fire was incessant and withering.

Self-sacrifice and heroism were common during those hours before Colenso. The difficulty was to restrain too many from rushing out to help the gunners; but that detracts not an iota from the merit of Roberts, Congreve, and Schofield, who have earned the V.C. as worthily as it was ever

won. Scores of times did I see horse and rider fall beneath the stroke of Boer bullet and shell into the vortex, and then some soldier-comrade would ride and assist his mate to rise, or two or more would set the wounded man on horse-back and bear him from the field. How shall I find space to tell half of the incidents? Men would have their horses shot under them, and the unwounded soldier would help his comrade to limp back to his command. Comrades true to death, too, were there, weary, wounded, assisting one another from the ground. Sometimes they managed to get away; more frequently they fell smitten, killed side by side. Generals Buller and Clery had numerous escapes, and ran risks that made men nervous about them, for the death of either would have been hailed by the enemy as a victory. Both were hit by glancing bullets: Buller in the side and Clery in the arm. Out of the Staff, Captain Hughes, R.A.M.C., was killed, others were wounded, and Lord Gerard had his horse shot twice. Captain Congreve crept into a donga, above which no one could with safety peep. From there he subsequently went out with Major Baptie, and brought in Lieutenant Roberts.

The end was near. Although Lyttelton's brigade moved closer forward to Hart's and Hildyard's support about noon; yet, there being no appreciable advance made in any direction, General Clery ordered a retirement. Word was sent to

the General Officer commanding the Field Batteries: "You are ordered to retire. You cannot get your guns away, I fear." The surgeons and ambulance men had followed in the footsteps of the troops, and done all that was possible to mitigate suffering. Still, there were many they could not reach, for the Boers took no notice of the Geneva Cross badge on any man's arm. Gradually, steadily, the infantry came in without flurry or fear. Nay, most of them were clamorous to be left to stay where they had won their way, confident by-and-by of rushing the Boer position. Several detached parties from Hart's brigade at Bridle Drift to Hlangwane learned too late that they had been left unsupported. Many of the Irish made plucky dashes through the field of death to rejoin their battalions. Others, less fortunate, were captured. Fourteen of the Devons, with Colonel Bullock, Major MacWalter, Captains Goodwin and Vigors, with fourteen gunners, including Colonel Hunt, lay in the same donga as Captain Congreve until 5 p.m. They hoped, like many more, to keep the enemy from carrying off the guns, and slip away themselves after sunset; but a complete retirement had been effected by the brigades actively engaged. Although Lyttelton's men had advanced, they were not permitted to take up a position from which they could check the Boers from returning to the south side of the Tugela.

By 4 p.m. the fight was practically at an end. Our naval guns, however, fired occasionally. Lyttelton's and Barton's brigades were still out, but Hart's and Hildyard's were moving into their old camp. The men had not lost heart, but smoked, chatted, and sang, and would have given the shirts off their backs to have been in at the Boers. But our losses were heavy; probably in all—killed and wounded and missing—some 1500. They must have run into 5000, or thereabouts, had the troops been permitted to force their way through the Boer works to the top of Grobler's Hill. Given re-arrangement of the disposition of the troops, I doubt not they would have carried the whole position. About 5 p.m. parties of Boers approached the ten guns, and Colonel Bullock threatened to fire upon them unless they retired. A parley ensued. The Boers declared their willingness to allow the wounded to be taken back into camp; but just then over 150 Boers got to within a few yards of the donga, and further resistance was hopeless. Colonel Bullock, declining to surrender, was knocked down and captured. With a good deal of consideration, the enemy furnished the wounded with water and cordials. All their arms, ammunition, and field-glasses were taken from them, and then an ambulance waggon was brought up, and the more severely injured were sent back; the unwounded, including Colonel Hunt, Royal Artillery, who they said was not seriously hit,

were made prisoners. Our loss in prisoners is about 330, including men from most of the battalions of Hart's and Hildyard's brigade, with several from General Barton's force. The Scottish Fusiliers, in that connection, had very bad luck, for they got left in an untenable position, and were surrounded. Our losses in officers have been heavy, but relatively not so great, since they have discarded swords and other too conspicuous insignia of rank.

On Saturday we slept in camp, facing the enemy, who began moving down heavy Creusot guns wherewith to shell us; but as there was no water available for any body of troops nearer than Frere, unless at Colenso, it was decided to send back two of the brigades. Indeed, water for drinking purposes was at a premium in Chieveley advanced camps on Saturday. That night there was an eclipse of the moon. In the dusk and dark tents were struck and packed. At 3 a.m. on Sunday Hildyard's and Hart's brigades were marched back to Frere, the Irishmen, I declare, growling terribly, and swearing that they were being taken the wrong road. It was to Colenso, sure, they should be going to see the Boers. With exceptional tact the majority of the wounded were recovered from the battlefield, and sent in to the ample and well-planned hospitals at Chieveley Railway-station, Frere, Estcourt, Pinburg, etc. Lyttelton's and Barton's brigades retired about a mile and a half, and are now, with the big naval guns and 12-pounders, occupying

a stony ridge commanding the southern roads from Colenso. We are said to be waiting for more guns and re-arranging plans for a successful battle and advance upon Ladysmith. General White has been informed of what has taken place, and told to hold on a little longer.

I regret to say Lieutenant Roberts succumbed to his painful injuries this (Sunday) morning. He was buried with five soldiers, each in separate graves, close to Chieveley Railway-station. General Clery and Staff attended the funeral, as well as many of the gallant deceased's brother Riflemen. There he now sleeps in a soldier's grave.

CHAPTER XV

INCIDENTS OF THE BATTLE OF COLENSO

Chieveley Camp, Friday, December 22

SINCE last Friday's battle our advanced camp has remained about two miles north of Chieveley Station; that is, we have withdrawn our front about one and a half miles—no more. The troops now occupy a higher and more commanding upland ridge. It has this, amongst other advantages, that whilst the Boer 100-pounder Creusot guns cannot easily worry our men, because the range is so great from the top of Grobler's Hill, the 4.7-inch naval guns can rake the foot-hills and trenches opposite Colenso with lyddite. Almost daily, but at irregular intervals, the naval guns, 4.7's and 12-pounders, have a little practice on their own account at the enemy's works. Sometimes they wreck a trench or shelter, and then can be seen for a few minutes groups of startled Boers bounding away across the rough country and making a bee-line for the nearest big hills. Excellent as

the weapons of the bluejackets are, their shooting is not always what it ought to be. That condition of mediocrity is chiefly owing to the uneven platform from which the guns are fired, and the fact that not the champion gunners, but others are often keen to try their skill in sighting.

Save for the firing of the naval guns, there is a dearth of military enterprise and activity in the camps far from pleasing to the active, restless spirits. The latter wish to be doing something all the time to harass and disturb the Boers. And if a few of the brigadiers and most of the colonels had their way, by night and by day the enemy would be treated to surprises wherein lead and steel would play a conspicuous part. At Chieveley Camp there are still the Earl of Dundonald's cavalry, Major-Generals Hildyard's and Barton's infantry brigades, and several batteries. Hart's and Lyttelton's brigades are back at Frere, where General Buller has again taken up his headquarters in the station-master's house. The 1st Dragoons (the Royals) are there also. Lieut.-General Clery is staying at Chieveley Camp. From what I have seen in the way of preparation, supplies, and transport, a big and more important movement forward than the last is being made ready. Forage, provisions, ammunition, and waggons are being got together at Estcourt, as well as Frere and Chieveley, for the impending advance. We hear that Sir

Charles Warren's division is *en route* to this place. Indeed, part of his infantry have already arrived (the Somersets), and to-day one of the howitzer batteries reached Estcourt, whence it will march by road to Chieveley. I am told that there are only three howitzer batteries to come out. That is all that England has available of the new and terrible engine of war! The excuse is that it takes some little time to train the gunners. And yet it is some time since the value of the 50-pounder lyddite howitzers was proved in battering the Mahdi's tomb at Omdurman. But it was ever thus in Pall Mall, and ever will be whilst public outcry is content to resolve itself into a mere roar of indignation or a sob of despair.

There is a great outcry in Natal at the miscarriage of last Friday's operations and the loss of the ten guns, the whole of the 14th Battery and four guns of the 66th Battery of Field Artillery. The Colonials had looked with great confidence to the repulse of the Boers and the opening of the road to Ladysmith. Maritzburg and Durban, which are hotbeds of rumour and its companions, bumptiousness and panic, have been denouncing General Buller. The bar-room and street generals have expressed their highly-flavoured views upon his mistakes, and shown how they would have done better with their left hands. Utter nonsense is noisily talked everywhere. General

Buller, to whom I have not had an opportunity of speaking since the fight, and by whom, therefore, I am neither directly nor indirectly inspired, struck when a British officer, under the circumstances, was bound to deal his blow. That it failed to get home was not altogether his fault. Ladysmith is being besieged. The only real way to relieve its garrison is to sweep aside the enemy who block the main roads thereto. There would be no real gain in trying to slip past the Boers into Ladysmith. General Buller's task is to smash the beleaguering enemy. The garrison, be they in what strength they may, can be trusted to do their best without Buller having first to place his men by their side.

It had been better, I think, had General Buller confined himself to one turning movement—that upon his right. Hart's attempt to cross Bridle Drift was foredoomed to failure. Amongst several reasons for want of success, therefore, was the fact that the position of the enemy's guns was unknown, and the Boer trenches had not been adequately searched by a heavy artillery fire. For weeks I had looked upon Hlangwane Hill on the east as the key of the situation. From there Grobler's Hill, and the whole of the Boer trenches opposite Colenso, would have been taken in flank and reverse. A line of cleavage would also have been driven in between the Free State and Joubert's men, and the Bulwan Mountain itself taken in reverse. When the Earl

of Dundonald and Major-General Barton between them did next to nothing in the way of seriously tackling Hlangwane, the action resolved itself into an indifferent reconnaissance in force. But the Boers knew the value of the Hlangwane position better, for it has afforded another line of advance or retreat across the Big Tugela besides that at Colenso. They have made a drift or ford below Pieter's Crossing, and supplemented the facilities for getting over it by the erection of a temporary bridge.

General Buller is a stern fighter, an indomitable man of more than bulldog pertinacity. Once launched into a fight, it is gall and wormwood to him to let go. I have seen him often in battle, and recognized his many admirable qualities as soldier and leader. How great, then, his courage must be —courage which subjugated his own temperament— when, seeing last Friday that, as things had shaped themselves, the contest must drive from bad to worse, he, with bold resolution, decided to stop the action. Men were being sacrificed, more would fall, and the Boer position would not be taken before nightfall. No; not for hours thereafter, for there were many trenches to be carried and high hills to be climbed ere the whole position could be considered as safely won. Yes; the troops could have held on till nightfall by the banks of the Tugela, and after dark the ten guns might have been withdrawn. But these things

would have had to be done under a withering artillery and rifle-fire directed from the Boer works. It may be assumed that fire would have grown in weight and danger, and might have been aggravated by an attack upon our right and the cutting of our line of communication. There is something, then, of moment to be said on both sides, and General Buller by his order reduced the check to an affair of relatively minor importance, delivering the men from what might have been the graver risk of a big retrograde movement with an enemy hanging upon our flanks.

And though I have said so much, yet I am free to confess the guns could have been withdrawn ; but at a price. Were they worth it ? Our remaining artillery could have concentrated their fire upon Fort Wylie ridge and the adjacent slopes and trenches, whilst the infantry raked the tops of the walls and trenches with their rifle-fire. That might have succeeded ; but there was also the danger that it would have given time to the Boers to bring more men and guns into the field. I must also add that it was during the actual retiring movement, not in their advance, that the three brigades engaged sustained the heaviest part of their losses.

There is little to add to my last letter as to the general conduct of the battle. It was the "Queen's," otherwise the West Surrey, which was on the right of Hildyard's brigade. Neither that battalion nor

the Devons were to have gone east of the railway. Both did, and chiefly because the ground was too circumscribed for the wide deployment necessary in engaging an enemy that shoots with much precision, and uses magazine-rifles. As the Boers never charge, there is no need for men to mass together, even in single line. The Queen's and Devons, like other battalions that day, got somewhat intermingled. Both, with magnificent hardihood, walked erect, hastening not a step, but, as though going out on an Aldershot field-day, strode down into Colenso and the river's bank. With death filling the air and tearing the ground, onward they went, the most superb spectacle of invincible manhood. Common soldiers in stained, creased khaki uniforms, homeliest of drab—they were heroes bound to command the admiration of the world. The Colonel of the Queen's, like other commanding officers, begged to be allowed to try and save the guns, or, at any rate, to be permitted to stay in Colenso until nightfall. Their total casualties were eighteen killed, 170 wounded.

The story of the lost two batteries is an epic, the mere dry bones of which I give, not even artistically put together. There is so much doing hour by hour to engage attention that, to draw out a rounded chronicle of Friday's, or any day's big fight, needs a wrench to get away from the events of the moment. From Captain Herbert, R.A., and Captain Fitzpatrick, a New Zealander, I have gathered

some details beyond what actually fell under my personal observation. There was a clump of timber about a mile east of Colenso by the Tugela's margin. Near there, it was thought, would be a good position for the two batteries—14th and 66th Royal Artillery —of the brigade division. The third battery was further still to the right, near Dundonald's cavalry. Not a sign did the enemy give of their presence; and still our big guns, the naval 4.7-inch lyddite throwers and the naval 12-pounders, pitched projectiles into the Boer works. Colonels Long and Hunt were both with the two batteries. Long sent Captain Fitzpatrick, who was mounted, to the 5th Queen's or Devons, asking them to send two companies to scour the wood. It is said that a major promised to send the men, but they did not put in an appearance in time. Meanwhile, as I have before related, the two batteries were advancing on their own responsibility between Barton's and Hildyard's brigades. It was not till later that the Scottish and Irish Fusiliers ranged themselves some distance behind, and in support of the batteries. The six naval 12-pounders, under Lieutenant James, unlimbered ultimately 400 yards behind, and on the right of the two field batteries, and the Fusilier battalions named were in rear of them. On the right of Barton's line in echelon were the Royal Fusiliers.

That day there were manœuvres which spelled delay in getting the brigade into position. Long

determined to survey the ground himself, and sent forward some of his own mounted men, including an officer or two. These the Boers allowed to approach the river bank, and one of the scouts actually rode upon, and crossed to the further side of, the highway bridge spanning the Tugela. They returned and reported there were no Boers anywhere about, whereupon Colonel Long took the guns forward to within 600 yards of the Tugela and 1200 yards of Fort Wylie. As soon as the artillery horses had unlimbered the guns, and their drivers were taking them back, the Boers suddenly opened a terrible rifle-fire on the batteries. It came from Fort Wylie and the lower and adjacent ridges and trenches. The Boer guns also began a little later throwing shrapnel, and the machine-gun firing solid shot at them. But the gunners never flinched nor winced, buckling to their work like men who grip a heavy load. Nay, more; some of them in derision began to "field," as at cricket, with the badly-aimed spent shot of the machine-cannon. Running aside they would make a catch, and call, "How's that, umpire?" Astounding, and yet more astounding, for this story is absolutely true! Boisterous and high, indeed, leapt the gunners' spirits. But their guns were all the while served accurately and hotly, and the ridge of Fort Wylie rang and hissed with the rush, burst, and splutter of shrapnel, mightily unsteadying and thinning the Boers' fire from there. Captains

Goldie and Schrieber fell, struck dead. Within a quarter of an hour Colonel Long, their chief, was knocked over, shot through the arm and body, a bullet passing through his liver and kidneys. He was carried aside 200 yards into a shallow donga, where lay several of the Devons and others. There, wounded as he was, Colonel Long sent for help to overcome the enemy's rifle-fire. But it did not come, for there was a difficulty about quickly finding either General Buller or General Clery.

Colonel Hunt next fell, shot through both legs, and he also was carried to the donga. As the men were being shot down very rapidly—for the Boer fire was by that time increasing—Colonel Hunt advised that it would be better to abandon the guns. But Long's characteristic reply was, "Abandon, be damned! We never abandon guns." Subsequently Colonel Hunt called attention to the fact that it was no use firing; there were scarcely any men left, and next to no ammunition. After that an order was given to abandon the guns, which for over one hour had fought in face of the fiercest fusillade a battery ever endured. Yet, even then, all was not over, for four men persisted in serving two guns and remaining beside their cannon. One of either pair carried the shell; the others laid and fired their beloved 15-pounders. But two men were left. They continued the unequal battle. They exhausted the ordinary ammunition, and

finally drew upon and fired the emergency rounds of case—their last shot. Then they stood to "Attention" beside the gun, and an instant later fell pierced through and through by Boer bullets. These, I say, by the light of all my experience in war, these gunners of ours, are men who deserve monuments over their graves and even Victoria Crosses in their coffins.

Captains Herbert and Fitzpatrick rode with orders to General Clery, and returned to the batteries during the action. Herbert had his horse shot; in fact, he had three horses shot that day, and yet himself escaped unhurt. Captain Fitzpatrick rode out twice with orders. In the end those two officers found themselves in the little donga with many more wounded and unwounded. Colonel Long became delirious, constantly repeating, "Ah! my gunners. My gunners are splendid! Look at them!"

About 3 p.m. they decided to make an attempt to ride out and rejoin the troops who had fallen back. The hail of fire was close and deadly; so much so that to peep above the donga was an invitation to death. Having shaken hands with one another and said good-bye, these officers resolved to attempt an escape. Captain Herbert rode off first, and had his third horse shot in the neck; but he got away clear. Ten minutes later Captain Fitzpatrick made essay. Bullets and shell rained around him, and a lucky small solid

Photo by] WATCHING THE BATTLE OF COLENSO. [*René Bull.*

shot, striking between his horse's heels, put such mettle and speed into the animal that he was quickly borne into safety. The third officer had scarcely got a few yards from the donga when he was killed by a shell.

CHAPTER XVI

FURTHER STORIES OF THE FIGHT

Chieveley Camp, Boxing Day

I AM between two opinions as to whether the echoes from the late battlefield at Colenso are not heard above the roll of drums and fifing of fifes that proclaim Christmastide and merry-making in our camp. Betwixt Briton and Boer along the Colenso lines was a religiously-kept, unauthorized truce. Our batteries were silent, and the enemy made no hostile movement beyond diligently labouring to increase the number of their trenches and the security of their forts and bombproofs; but they showed no such forbearance nor respect for the day towards Ladysmith. From Mount Bulwan and Bester's Farm they pitched murderous missiles into the town and camps. Their execution luckily falls far behind their fell intent.

From lofty Umkolandi to the east we are in daily and frequent helio correspondence. Private as well as military messages are transmitted by Captain Cayzer over the route, and flashed from

there direct to our camps. One of the helios yesterday was to the effect that, as dodging Boer shells did not afford sufficient exercise, officers and men were engaged in polo and other athletic games. All through, the death-rate from Boer shell-fire in Ladysmith has been relatively small—insignificant, compared with the inroads arising from sickness.

Another of the messages from Ladysmith yesterday came from Sir George White himself. It was in response to a greeting from Colonel Thorold, of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who expressed the hope of seeing him speedily, as the relief column was on the way. General White's reply was, "Same to you and your gallant battalion. Reciprocate very sincerely for an early meeting." I learn that although turkeys and plum puddings were more conspicuous by their absence, and toasts were drunk from casks which flowed with liquor that did not inebriate, yet the garrison loyally kept the day. Bully beef and baked biscuit puddings figured chiefly in the bills of fare, but good humour seasoned and made their Christmas meal enjoyable and memorable.

At Frere and Chieveley camps the soldiers had each a quart of wholesome beer. A few there were who managed to toast the Queen and success in champagne or spirits. The men had the campaign extras served out to them—bacon, farm milk, and, thanks to the Army Service Corps, fresh bread

and fine cuts of good Natal oxen, which enabled them to have excellent Christmas cheer. At some tables there were turkeys and plum puddings; the cavalry, as usual, proving their capacity to take care of No. 1. This is the menu of the Irish Fusiliers' officers' mess, at which the officers of the Naval Brigade were guests :—

Soup.—Colenso.

Fish.—Salmon Tugela.

Entrées :

Poulets de Ladysmith,
Jambon à la Grobler's Kloof.
Joint.—Trek ox.

Vegetables :

Cronje beetroot.
Asperges Glacés Buller,
Pommes de terre Hlangwane.
Choux à la Chieveley.

Pudding.—Plum de John Bull.
Mince Pies Lyddite.
Apricots 4.7.

Fruits :

Pineapple à la Kruger,
Grenadielles à la Barton.

Sweet :

Gatacre à la Clery,

Wines :

Champagne H.M.S. Forte,
Port Terrible,
Whisky Powerful,
Taunus water.
Maritz Beer De Plucky Natal.

Chieveley Camp, Christmas, 1899.

There were sports both yesterday and to-day in all the camps: first the trials in the morning, and in the afternoon the finals. The programme was as varied and interesting as that of the Royal Military Tournament, Islington. It included—beside the military events—cutting the lemon, tent-pegging, etc., tugs of war, athletic sports, horse, mule, and donkey races. The Devons won the tug of war, and the Army Service Corps the wrestling on horseback and the tug of war.

Christmas and Boxing Days, as I have indicated, were ushered in by the drums and fifes merrily making the rounds. There are those who prefer the gentler home waits; but there is that peculiarity about fife and drum, those irritant early awakers from sleep, that their martial pulsations catch the heart and set the blood aglow, thumping through the veins to their rhythmic beating. "Jack's the lad for work, and Jack's the lad for play;" and our bluejackets were the boys who provided the lighter vein of amusement. Christmastide in South Africa, and Natal in particular, has been frizzling hot. Here the sun was over the yardarm. A band of jolly Jack Tars made the round of the camp, capering and singing, preceded by a sailor on horseback bearing a Union Jack and followed by nearly half a score of messmates making ridiculously rough weather on muleback. The sailors seated on a gun-carriage were two. Of their number, one represented John Bull, the other, a marine, personated

Oom Paul—whom the tars and the soldiers generally prefer to call "Ole Kroojer." Kruger had his hat, pipe, and umbrella, and real good fun the sailors made of the business, John Bull giving "Kroojer" no end of nasty knocks, and occasionally sitting upon his chest, whilst Pat and Sandy further fairly bedevilled the wretched one. The tars and soldiers sang bravely during the marchings, and at the sports "Rule Britannia," set to new words, and all the popular catchy airs of the day, were laid under tribute to enable the men to describe with gusto what they had in store for Kruger. As the Queen's presents and plum-puddings from home had not arrived—it is difficult to get letters, let alone parcels—I submitted a proposition on the *Daily Telegraph's* behalf to provide sports and some Christmas cheer for the troops of Hildyard's and Barton's brigades now at Chieveley. Some difficulties presented themselves, but these were overcome, and not only had the troops a good time, but I was able to add a little to their enjoyment. A friend was sent down to Pietermaritzburg to purchase various articles, and Mr. Sydney Goldmann, learning what I was about, kindly volunteered to help.

Yesterday, therefore, taking my Cape cart, he and I called at the camps of each of the eight battalions of infantry and the Naval Brigade and made presents of cigars, cigarettes, and cake to the men. The officers, of course, were able to cater for themselves. Needless to say, the soldiers

and sailors expressed their heartiest thanks for the gift. I wish we could have done as much, or more, for comrades in Ladysmith.

Natal is the New Scotland of South Africa. Sandy is a power in the land. He runs the railways, and splendidly are they managed. The military have wisely left the working control of the lines entirely in the hands of the local officials. Yesterday, however, something occurred to show that Scotchmen don't object to keeping Christmas, if only you let them hold their New Year festivities. The military railway staff officer at Chieveley waited most of the afternoon for the arrival of an expected train, which was to convey fifty men down the line. Tired, and losing patience, he sought the telephone and rang up Estcourt. There was a strain of bagpipes blowing full blast all down the line, and a flavour of Sandy, or something stronger. "What ho! How about the train?" "What train?" "The one to come for the fifty men!" "There's nae train going the night." "Oh! isn't there! I suppose you don't care a damn?" said the vexed captain. "Well," came the answer, with caution, "I would not go so far as just to say that"—but no train came, and the colloquy was closed.

I have wired you how the Lord Mayor sent a Christmas gift to the 7th, or Royal, Fusiliers, and how that London Regiment was not forgotten by its associated volunteer battalion—the 2nd Volunteer Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers. There have

been numerous instances of further courtesies and greetings from home and abroad to battalions and friends here. Well, Christmas, 1899, has gone, and its camp festivities have not been without blessing and boon to all in strengthening home associations and ties, in helping for a few hours to a partial effacement of the recent painful scenes, and in nerving the soldiers to fresh deeds of valour and further sacrifices for Queen and country.

Here is a matter only indirectly connected with the war, to which my attention has been called. It seems that about this season the mining companies of the Transvaal are accustomed to pay in several hundred thousands every year to the Boer Exchequer. The money is not actually due for three months, but the companies, profiting by sad experience, always prefer to be well forward of time in these payments, for oversight or delay would involve confiscation of their property. Sir Alfred Milner has been approached by these bodies, which include others besides British shareholders, and has made reply that he can offer no advice in the case. Now, if these hundreds of thousands are paid to the credit of Kruger and Co., that, surely, will be affording aid and comfort to the enemy—a thing no loyal subject can stoop to do. The Colonial Office and the Law Lords will have, willy-nilly, to deal with the matter.

The second advance for the relief of Ladysmith is slowly taking definite form. Our cavalry, at last,

are doing something to justify their presence. It runs counter to all former experience of the British trooper to see him held so much in leading strings. Only now and again is he permitted to venture a few miles from camp. Even then he often betrays himself by falling into some not very cunning Boer trap. A few days ago Captain James Rutherford and Mr. Charles Grenfell, younger brother of Mr. Grenfell, of Taplow, who was attached on Thursday last to the South African Light Horse, were captured by the enemy. They were out visiting the picquets, and, passing one, rode on to a Boer farmhouse which, doubtless, the enemy had marked down as a bait. Both rode into the hands of the enemy's scouts, were forced to surrender, and they are now alive, but said to be going to Pretoria. So state native runners who saw them.

Colonel Byng's South African Light Horse, like Colonel Bethune's and Colonel Thorneycroft's mounted infantry, contain many well-known people. J. J. Ferris, the Australian left-hand bowler, is of them. There are, besides, fighting for the Union Jack a squadron of useful cowboys. All the Mounted Volunteers have proved themselves to be full of enterprise and go. Were it left to Major McKenzie and others like him, the Boers, who raided or scouted far afield from their main bodies, would have a pitiable time, and find hospitable gaols or graves more quickly in Natal. This week the Boer scout has been seen looking about our

flanks as far south as Frere, yet the mounted volunteer or trooper is quite his match. A month or so ago Colonel Long, R.H.A., who is now out of danger from his wounds, recommended the raising of 500 scouts from the districts around Estcourt. Local farmers to that number were anxious to join, but the military authorities interposed their veto. That is now withdrawn, and the troop is to be raised. Had it been in existence about the time of the Willow Grange fight, not all of Joubert's and Burger's riders would have got so easily back from Mooi River.

I noticed yesterday that the graves at Frere are being added to, although the troops are in good health. Yet there is a trace of dysentery in some of the camps. Dr. Treves, I think, says that if the war goes on at this rate we shall lose more troops by disease than by cannon or rifle. Young Lieutenant Roberts' grave and the others have been fenced about and wooden crosses erected as temporary memorial tablets. The pall-bearers who carried the remains of Lord Roberts' son, were Major Prince Christian Victor, Colonels Buchanan, Riddell, Versicke, Copley, and Major Stuart-Wortley—all of them Riflemen. Still harping on the battle of Colenso, I have good reason to say that the next advance will bring better results, for we hear that the garrison hope to be relieved before the end of January, or they will sortie on their own account. I wish I were able to carry in a few

luxuries to them, and I hope to before the end of the first week of the next year. The last attack failed, as I have tried to show, by not pushing forward our right and seizing Hlangwane's rough hill. That position once in our hands, the whole of the Boer trenches and works before Colenso would have been turned. Six weeks ago I passed close to the ground, and spoke of its advantage to Governor Hely-Hutchinson, and more than one officer of distinction. The principal objection that the river could not be forded or crossed, in that vicinity, had been disproved by the Boers making a ford and bridge. In the action of the 16th inst., Colonel the Earl of Dundonald had about won the summit of the Hlangwane. It is a pity, as I have heard, that he did not send in more of his men ; and yet a greater reason for regret that Major-General Barton refused for some reason to assist them. Half a battalion would have assured the capture of the hill.

It begins to leak out that in more than one instance General Buller's orders were not only blunderingly executed, but were actually disregarded. Major-General Hart's error had, as all now know, terrible results. He marched his brigade in quarter-column far within the cannon and rifle-fire zone of the Boers. The Dublin Fusiliers, numbering ten corps, with the added three from their first battalion, were marching in line of companies, fours in front ; that is, the companies were ranged side by

side, as if each were in column of route. Behind them in quarter-column marched the Connaught Rangers, the Inniskilling Fusiliers, and Border Regiment, in order named. Their instruction was to go to Bridle Drift. Whilst the Dublins held that ford the others were to force a passage. One of the Boer shells placed eleven of the Connaught Rangers *hors de combat*, and the hailstorm of bombs was accompanied by a worse and more deadly hurricane of Mauser bullets. The men doubled to get into open order. Major-General Hart angrily reproved them. The evolution, he loudly commanded, must be done in quick, not double, time. Here there was a wide ditch which had to be crossed; but within ten minutes the Dublin Fusiliers were there, and upon the top of them, crowding, came the remaining battalions. They tried to ascend 600 yards to the left, but the fire was too awful to enable them or their comrades to force the passage. Moreover, as I have said, the water was too deep, and Bridle Drift has not yet been found.

Though unable to ford or to advance, and although they received no assistance from their field artillery, the soldiers joked and chatted. Colonel Brook, of the Connaught Rangers, was shot. Some of his men bore him from the field. On the way that slushy thud, which is the noise made by a bullet, told some one had been hit. "Who?" asked the wounded Colonel. "Begorra, sir, it's me," said one of his stretcher-bearers. "It's in the neck."

"Put me down," said Colonel Brook. "No, sir; I am well able to carry you to a place of safety," replied Pat. He did; and when he laid the stretcher down, the bullet, which had passed clean through his neck, had caused such a loss of blood that he fell in a dead faint.

Colonel Thackeray, of the Inniskilling Fusiliers, saved himself by his wit and fortitude from capture. He was left behind in an impossible corner, to which he had advanced with a mixed lot of the adventurous from the other battalions — the Dublins, the Connaughts, and the Borderers. About 1 p.m. they saw the ambulance approach, at the sight of which the Red Cross was raised, and later on the Boers ceased fire, and an informal truce was inaugurated.

It should be explained that, owing to the winding of the supposed drift, the troops were a little way from the Tugela. Some of the Boers pushed south, whilst Colonel Thackeray and his men were moving towards the rear. Having learned that a general retirement had been ordered, the Boer leader called to Colonel Thackeray that he was a prisoner, with the rest of the soldiers. "Oh no," said Colonel Thackeray; "we were firing all the time. You advanced under the Red Cross, as if it were a flag of truce, and we let you." "Well, now, you must lay down your arms," said the Boer Commandant. "No; why should we?" asked Colonel Thackeray. "Let us go back and begin again." Then the

gallant Inniskilling started to argue the point. Strange to say, he almost convinced, and, at any rate, gained the respect of the Boer, who said at last, bluntly, "Well, I have no orders. Perhaps you are right. I'll turn my back and won't see you. So you can clear off with all your men." Colonel Thackeray did so with promptitude.

Well, after all, the Boer is an adversary worth dealing with, and adding to the roll of the sons of the Empire—as we shall include him beyond a doubt—and, with the burst of the Afrikander bubble, as I have said ere now, a loyal subject he will become. Major Barton, of the Connaught Rangers, found himself left almost alone in another part of the field. About 2 p.m. he looked around, saw no one moving about, and thought he would fill the landscape. Going a little way he saw several dead and wounded men, and in answer to their pleading, descended to the river, filling their water-bottles, and giving them a good drink. Then he suddenly found himself face to face with a party of Boers, who presented their rifles. He told them not to play the fool by shooting. "Are you a medical or fighting officer?" they asked. He said he was a fighting one. As there was firing going on in that part of the field they arranged between them to stop it. A pair of white flags were displayed. Major Barton proceeded to order the men to cease firing. On the way he met another, who at first declined to believe his story, and then did but put

him on parole as a prisoner not to fight. Major Barton got into camp, but a court has decided he must respect his parole, and he has been sent down the country.

We had the first visit of the foreign military attachés a day or two ago. They were escorted over the lines, and shown the Boer position. The only remark the American representative made when he saw the hills and trenches approaching the kloof was: "Well, now, was there no way round?"

CHAPTER XVII

TRACTION-ENGINES AT WORK

Tuesday, January 2, 1900

Buller's men are waiting, but not idling, in their camps. The Ladysmith relief column is gathering strength whilst it stands guard over the safety of Natal and the complete deliverance of the land from the Boer invaders. There have been daily exercises for the troops, for the cavalry small reconnaissances and scouting, for the infantry and gunners drills and manœuvres, and horsemen and sportsmen alike—so keen is their enthusiasm—would have preferred more work of the kind they have latterly had, knowing in that way lies victory. For the better maintenance of their health and the easier provisioning of the soldiers, the army has been distributed into several camps, all of which are close to the railway. Chieveley has been left with a sufficient garrison of all arms, including Major-Generals Hildyard's and Barton's brigades, with artillery, naval and field, Royal Engineers and Cavalry, Regulars and Volunteers. Sir Redvers has his

headquarters at Frere, where there is also a similar considerable body of troops, besides the infantry of Major-Generals Lyttelton's and Hart's brigades. We correspondents all removed a few days ago back to this place, Frere, in order to be near the headquarters of General Buller and neighbourly with the new Press censor, Major Jones. Press censorship soldiers, as a rule, find it a thankless and uncongenial task; there have been six changes in the office within two months. It is no easy function for the sagest to discharge, and experience has taught me that the Press censor, like the poet, is born, not made. The hard official rules and the zeal to prevent even minor matters being made known through official channels—though the enemy and our public may be in possession of the information from other sources—are the stumbling-blocks to journalistic enterprise with our troops in the field. Nay; there is another deterrent repressive feature, of which you may or may not be aware, connected with war news. On great days—battle days—no message of any kind can be forwarded until the General's official despatch has been transmitted. You millions at home may be panting for the news which we, your representatives, are burning to send. But no; for hours you and we must wait, and therefore, the censor's "clear the line"—the imperative signals which precede the General's message—put aside all other telegrams, however glutted the cables are. This might be thought a good enough

start over all ordinary mortals, but these are things perhaps best not discussed now, and which must wait for settlement and adjustment when the whole business of the public interest and of the Press comes to be more freely and officially determined. I hope the censorship is not to me as King Charles' head was to poor Mr. Dick.

Turning aside to spread myself upon that almost forbidden topic, I had omitted to refer to the new and big camp re-created at Estcourt. I am not alluding to troops required for guarding our line of communication—that is a very different affair—but to Sir Charles Warren's division, or to the major portion of it. Some six battalions or more of that command have arrived at Estcourt to reinforce the relief column. There all are encamped waiting for the order to go forward to Ladysmith. The losses at Colenso on December 15 last have all been more than made good. Like to a change of votes from one side to the other is the loss of cannons to an army; ten taken by the Boers required that we should have twenty guns to restore our preponderance of artillery fire. Well, we have luckily secured that and more, for there are now five additional batteries available, or thirty guns. Three of these and the 50-pounder howitzer batteries were expected, but the fourth has come as an unexpected Christmas or New Year's gift, and is most welcome.

Two other important adjuncts to Buller's army's

fighting power and mobility have also arrived in this holiday season. The first of the accessions alluded to is a war balloon, which is now with all its equipment here at Frere. Why an Aldershot balloon, or half a dozen of them, have not been sent here two months ago, or since Sir George White has been pent up in Ladysmith, is a problem for which I offer no solution. They are always in evidence at home manœuvres and reviews, and lead to much craning of necks and infinite satisfaction as to their purpose, abilities, and usefulness in warfare. I have frequently heard it said by some high authorities among our countrymen, that we English are of so sporting and fair-minded a turn of mind that it requires one year of the actualities of campaigning and fighting before we wake up and begin to do our militant selves anything like justice in action. The delayed balloon, slow transports, insufficiency of guns and cavalry, reluctance to employ volunteers, Colonists or home-bred, go towards proving there is much verity in the assertion. Perhaps Natal is unique in the difficulties it offers to the prosecution of war on stereotyped modern methods. Its rocky bewildering chains of hills and mountains, its deep-dented interlacing of spruits are so many natural fortified positions waiting to be occupied and held by the first in the field against all comers. As the German military attaché, Von Luturz, remarked when he first saw Colenso lines, "It is a natural fortress. I could not have believed

it so perfectly defensible and almost impregnable unless I had seen it."

Weather permitting, the half-score or so of strong Aldershot traction-engines, which have at last been detrained here and at Chieveley, will do much to making General Buller's army compact and mobile. Without them the troops would require an astounding length of ox and mule-waggons. The despised ox-waggon is slow and sure. Its infallible drawbacks are that it occupies a considerable length of road, requires much guarding with many attendants, and can only be depended upon to haul not more than 600 lbs. Nay more, if the teams are to carry their own forage, the power of hauling is limited to something like fifty miles. Were the army entirely dependent upon trek ox-waggon, the 1660 of them, the inconsiderable number for conveying the munitions of this army would stretch along several miles of road. It will be another affair if the dry weather continues and any great use can be made of the traction-engines. They require few attendants, don't gibe, and each can easily haul twelve tons. Yesterday and to-day these wheeling puffing Billees have been running to-and-fro transporting stores from the railway siding to the respective brigade camps—one of which, Hart's, is two miles away. They leisurely descend into spruits, roll across, and wheel up stiff, long climbs, like flies walking up a wall. Tacked on to one of the big guns they should, weather

permitting, shift them rapidly from place to place; nor are they quite helpless when the ground has been soaked with rain. Clip-irons are attached to the rims of the broad wheels, and these dig into the firmer soil, and the steamer rolls forward, leaving a wake like a ploughed field. On the flat, dry veldt the steamers strip along at a brisk eight miles an hour.

Little of moment has happened since last Friday beyond the dual diurnal pounding of Colenso lines by our guns, and Ladysmith by the Boer cannon. Occasionally the enemy do damage, as when the other day one of their shells burst in an officers' mess. Our naval gunners are, I think, without vaunting, though burning less powder, effecting heavier casualties. They have now got such an intimate knowledge of the Boer positions that they have but to put on the lyddite to make the Boers scuttle away to their holes or gallop off quickly far from the scene and the range of any existing gun. Lieut.-General Sir Francis Clery still remains at Chieveley. Tommy has a sweet knack of description. "Who is this Clery?" said a newcomer. "It's General Clery," said a comrade; "don't yer know him?" "No; what's he like?" "Oh, you can't mistake him at all. Thin, queer-looking bloke, with a puzzle beard and blue whiskers." I have known many more elaborate and less accurate "wanteds" published.

The week almost closed with dire wet weather.

We had three days of storm—real rough campaigning weather. Bisley in flood, and the heath a puddle, was a pleasure place compared to most of the camps. At Chieveley and Frere the men got wet through and through, and those on picquet-duty soaked to the marrow. We dug our tent water-trenches deeper, and made the best of it without a murmur, and, if they had been brigades of Mark Tapleys, the men could not have accepted the situation more good-humouredly. When at last the sun ventured to shine in the afternoon, the camps became transformed into drying-fields, clothes and blankets being laid out. Many a soldier also availed himself of the free supply of water to do the family wash, going savage and kilted whilst the garments were drying.

There have, as I indicated, been various small reconnaissances and exchanges of shots between outlying picquets or prying scouts and patrols. The events of the week have been the failure to smash the fifty Boer waggons between the Little and Big Tugelas, and the failure to attack the isolated body of the enemy at Hlangwane Hill. Colonel Parsons, R.A., rode out on Saturday and saw the waggons. He was vexed that he had not brought up two guns to pulverize them. Such chances do not occur often, and cavalry leaders and lesser commanders will have to take charge and go in if they mean to score off the enemy. As to Hlangwane—which is a rough scrub-hill on this side

Photo by] THE CAMPING-GROUND AT ESTCOURT AFTER THE STORM, NOVEMBER 23. [*René Bull.*

of the Tugela, east of Colenso, the lines of which it commands—it was intended to send a strong force to storm that Boer stronghold the other day. The Tugela was up, and the 2000 Boers there were quite isolated, for the drift was impassable and their temporary bridge was swept away. Before the troops, however, were ready to move the Tugela fell, and the Boers there would have been reinforced by all Joubert's strength. It is assumed that he has 8000 to 12,000 men ready to bar our way. Within the course of this week the second, and, I am sanguine, successful effort to relieve Ladysmith will be made. Whatever flank attacks may be made, it is now tolerably certain that there will be another fight immediately opposite Colenso. Probably two 6-inch naval guns will assist the 4.7-inch cannons in shelling the Boer works. Still, with all we can do with shot and shell, we cannot escape the penalty of stormers, and the casualty-list may run into several thousands ; but with Grobler's Hill and the heights won, the Boers will, in turn, be made to pay the full penalty of their obstinacy and hardihood, and General Buller—or he and White between them—should account for at least 4000 of the enemy. In that case the issue should have a wholesome and startling effect on shortening the war.

Disintegration in a force persistently fighting in defensive positions always proceeds rapidly. There was a little plan laid for the Boers the other night to draw them into their trenches, and then shell them

thoroughly. Thorneycroft's troopers went down with the mounted infantry towards the Tugela, but the naval gunners, failing to hear the musketry in the swish of the rain, did not keep their part of the bargain and bombard the trenches. The Boers were awakened by our men's fire, and blazed away for nearly an hour, doing, however, no damage. Yesterday they opened a very heavy Mauser and Maxim-fire upon some of the scouts who were sniping their horseflesh and guards. Again they hit nobody, and in return caught a warming from the naval guns. On New Year's Eve (Hogmanay) the first of the promised plum-puddings arrived in Chieveley. They were a consignment from Messrs. J. Lyons (Limited), London, and were served for our New Year's dinners. Being, happily, a recipient of one, I can speak of the excellence of their making and condition. The Tommys were delighted, and they will fight all the better for being so deservedly well remembered at home.

CHAPTER XVIII

BULLER'S FORCE PREPARING FOR NEW MOVE

Chieveley Camp, December 29, 1899

CHRISTMAS season has come and gone with its memories and activities, joyful and sorrowful. We have thought of the dear homeland whilst we frizzled under midsummer's sun, or were pelted hours together by the fierce thunderstorms that swept across Natal from the lofty Drakensberg Range. Our Christmas dinners have been eaten, our festive toasts drunk, and we have had high junketings—athletic sports, sing-songs, race meetings, and what not—under the very noses and eyes of our enemy, the Boer. Boxing Day fairly wound up the round of our gaieties, and, if I mistake not, the Boers congregated upon the high ridges of Grobler's, and the adjacent hills walling the north bank of the Tugela, and looked down at our merry-making. The officers' races in the gymkhana afforded capital sport. There were point-to-point matches and many more besides, all hotly contested, over smooth or rocky slopes. The prizes

included the Tugela Plate, value £50—a piece of boiler-iron blown from Frere Bridge in its demolition by the Boers. Besides that, there was the Railway Plate, a similar souvenir from the wrecked armoured train; a grand piano, recovered loot, owners unknown, and sundry other curious prizes, including the chief of them all—whisky and soda *ad lib.*

Whilst we have had field-days, the battalions at Chieveley Camp going out alternately, plodding over the bare plain or hiding under cover among the small and dark dongas, the Boers have continued to busy themselves at digging trenches and building forts and bomb-proofs. Along the flat valley-land, and upon the majestic semi-circular sweep of the ranges over the Tugela, the enemy are never tired, toiling to add trench to trench and fort to fort, wherein to cunningly hide their cannon. We bombard their lines almost every day, the two 4.7-inch naval guns sending lyddite shells into their works, but not a shot do the Boers vouchsafe us in return. Yet their 100-pounder Creusot guns, which we know they possess, and have mounted opposite Colenso, are able to find our range. Gun Hill, as we have come to call it, is on the east (right) of the railway, about two and a half miles north of Chieveley Station, and 8000 yards or thereby from Fort Wylie. Upon the ridge we have the big naval cannon and a battery of naval 12-pounders. It is from there that the bluejackets delight to tickle the Dutchmen. At the first sound of our guns they

duck into their trenches and pits like rabbits, and thus much irregular ingenuity has to be exercised to catch them unawares. The trenches are not easy to hit, but the sailors, by careful manipulation, manage at times to put a shell or two into the holes where the enemy swarm. Scarcely a day passes now but the Boers pay toll in wounded and dead to the accuracy and fatal fire of the big cannon and lyddite. So much we learn from our runners, and can see in part for ourselves as the Boers carry away their comrades.

We now know that in order to escape the nightly rain-storms and drenching of the past few days, the enemy crowd into native kraals and creep into Colenso's deserted houses, to escape drenching and enjoy sleep. Yesterday afternoon the sailors threw a few shells into Colenso, and then marked down the direction and range for an after-dark bombarding. Pegs were driven into the ground to which, later on, candles were attached, whilst the degrees of elevation for distance were known. About 10 p.m., when presumably the Boers were sleeping in Colenso, two lyddite shells were sent screaming into the town. The flash of the 4.7-inch guns is like lightning in brightness and swiftness, and the roar of the explosion like ear-splitting thunder. Ere the Boers could have been awake, or could have heard the noise, the lyddite must have descended amongst them, rending walls and houses with its terrific detonation. Six shots

only were administered to them—something of their own mode of treatment of Ladysmith, where day and night, Christmas included, they have given no rest to the British beleaguered in that town. Evidently from their heavy cannonading of Ladysmith during the last three days, the enemy are getting anxious to bring matters to a head.

General Buller has a choice of two routes to turn the Boer lines at Colenso. He may go eastward *viâ* Weenen, or westward by Potgieter's Drift or Springfield. At the moment the evidences point to his having selected the Springfield route. But General Buller has made it a custom rigidly to keep his own counsel in these matters. The double loops made by the Tugela at Potgieter's Drift are not inviting, nor is the gateway through which the troops must pass into the open, flat lands near Acton Homes. But it is said a succession of boldly-defined hills—Swartz Kop, Krantz Kloof, and others—command the fords and roads into the plains west of Ladysmith. Possibly so; but maps and information supplied here have proved untrustworthy before to-day. The other road, by Weenen, is rougher going, and would bring us in on the east side of Bulwan, or Lombard's Kop. Springfield has advantages over that route. Both involve long *détours*, quitting the railway, and a big supply column, for we cannot start with less than six days' provisions. From Frere to Springfield is about twenty to twenty-five miles, and the distance to Weenen is little if any

less. More and more's the pity that, during the attack upon Colenso, a determined effort was not made to carry Hlangwane, which completely turns the Boer works about Grobler's Hill and the Tugela Valley. It is rough country; but being upon this, the south side of the river, it would have served admirably for a safe and excellent artillery position, if not for launching our flanking assault along the shoulders of the ridges held by the Boers. Since then, they have done something to strengthen Hlangwane. But at best it is the weak spot in their lines, for with the Tugela in flood, as it is now after the rains, those left to defend Hlangwane would be completely cut off from rejoining their comrades over the river. There has also been found, within the last twenty-four hours, a low crest two miles west of this camp, whence many of the Boer trenches can be raked. The enemy have a great trench, over a mile in length, extending from west of a kraal upon the flat land towards the roadway winding round the foot-hills opposite Colenso. Upon that, and other works close by, they are to be seen at any hour of the day or evening; even during the night the lightning discloses them, hard at work in their shirt-sleeves, shovelling dirt and piling stones. They have Kaffirs, too, helping them, whom they force to toil for no pay and the coarsest of rations. When our naval guns start banging lyddite the Boers, it has been found, mostly quit the big trench and take shelter in a narrow and

deep donga, where they have secretly ventured to spread a few patrol-tents. Now that their cunning hiding-place has been found out, they will have a visitation of lyddite within the next few hours.

The brief period of unusual drought has been succeeded this week by heavy storms and a great rainfall. Not as it rains at home does it come down in Natal, but in a deluge. Within an hour or two after one of the black thunderstorms which gather from all points of the compass, tearing and hustling, the earth runs with water like a sea, and the rivers roar, soupy and bank high. Just now the Tugela is boiling full, and the Boers holding Hlangwane must be completely isolated. Shall we go out and endeavour to bag them, two thousand or so? It is more than doubtful. Small enterprises have, apparently, no place in the large Aldershot vocabulary. There are balloons in South Africa, and three I wot of in Ladysmith. But not one aerostat has been employed yet with this force; presumably they are not to be had nearer than Cape Town or England. And yet one would have been of almost incalculable value to the General and the troops on the 15th inst. at the battle of Colenso. It would have disclosed not only the presence of the Boers in their trenches and lining the river banks, but where their guns were placed. Last night it was odd to see the farmer-Boers turn on their electric searchlight in order to prevent the signals from ours at Frere being read in Ladysmith. As there

is now helio communication, the nightly flashing of electric-light signals has ceased to be so important. Besides, Ladysmith, being without such apparatus, cannot flash a response. Within five minutes after our powerful Frere machine turned on its luminous beams the Boers shot their lesser ray straight against it, flashing from somewhere below the Bulwan, upon the west side. As the strong light glanced to and fro, and made the dot and dash signals, the Boers kept wriggling their beam about and winking tremendously in order to spoil the blink, blinkity signs. But the electric light apparatus, which was another of the contributions of the Navy to the Army, manned by sailors, cast a beam of great strength and length, to which the Boer flash was as a tallow-dip to a brilliant gas-jet or incandescent lamp. I fancy, therefore, with all their wriggling strategy, that most, if not all, of the message from General Buller to Sir George White, was read and understood. And so we won the battle of the clouds and lights.

I have said we have, for the most part, sat idly, doing practically nothing at Chieveley Camp. The men have amused themselves, despite weather and Boers, with games—football and cricket. Only the British soldier discloses energy enough for such exercises. Our national fondness for field-sports is verily an unmixed blessing in war, as in peace, for it keeps the troops in healthy, cheerful bodily and mental vigour. Within the past day or two

the Volunteer cavalry at Chieveley have taken turns in little scouting processions east and west. The South African Light Horse, under Colonel Byng, have ridden up the bank of the Tugela as far as the junction of the little with the big river of the same name. They saw no Boers on the south side, and had only seven shots fired at them from the opposite shore. All the Mauser bullets went wide of the mark. Colonel Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry rode off yesterday around the south slopes of Hlangwane and drew blank. The Boers did not show themselves, and Thorneycroft's orders were not to attack the rough Hlangwane Hill. Major-General Hildyard's brigade is still here, the marching orders being countermanded. It is not likely to move off for two days. The two big 6-inch guns, and other naval guns, have not been brought hither as yet. When they begin to bombard Colenso lines the enemy's mortality bill should increase by leaps and bounds. It is proposed to run these 100-pounder cannon by rail within a few yards of the firing position at Chieveley Gun Hill. Probably, when the demonstration to renew the attack upon Colenso lines is made from Chieveley, some of the guns will be moved into better positions, and from the brave show to be made of tents, the Fusilier Brigade will march onward as if to renew the frontal assault.

The recent rains are turning the baked-brown earth and stubble into a dainty green, and there

will soon be good forage for the half-starved Boer horses. We are not so dependent upon the caprices of seasons, for our Army Service Corps have done so well that there has never been lack of excellent provender for man or beast. Plenty of good oats, bran, and hay that have come thousands of miles over the seas, and all that the largest provider can supply of really needful creature comforts, down to fresh bread and meat daily, are to be had in abundance. Never was army better cared for, nor has any soldier deserved more than Tommy fighting your battles in South Africa. His faults are, perhaps, occasionally too obtrusive, but his virtues as a downright, honest fighting-man are beyond blazonment. In the heat or the thunderstorm he does his duty. He may be left out upon a hill by some colonel or brigadier for three days and nights, upon detached picquet-duty, as at Mooi River, but he takes the rough and the smooth, and with about equal grumbling at either too much or too little work. Defeat does not daunt him, and success does not spoil him. Britain has reason to be proud of her common soldiers, and even the Boers are opening their eyes to the surprising quality of the whilom red-necks or red-jackets.

I have just learned that the Boer official account of their losses at Colenso on the 15th inst. placed them at 115 killed, mostly by shell-fire. One of the medical officers of the 2nd Brigade—Major-General Hildyard's—has supplied me, though rather

late, with the following notes of the battle of December 15 last: "During the earlier part of the engagement the casualties nearly all occurred in the two batteries of artillery which were eventually captured (ten guns only). The wounded were carried into a sharp-dipping donga and there attended to. As the enemy's firing was so well directed, it was impossible for those who had taken refuge there to move out. The infantry of the 2nd Brigade were ranged along the front. About 300 yards behind, on the side of the railway, was a house which we employed as a dressing-station. Two red-cross flags were put upon the roof. That did not prevent shells flying about it, and the corrugated iron roof often rattled with broken pieces of the Boer bombs. The slightly wounded were placed in the verandah, and one of these was killed where he lay.

"Soon the wounded of the 2nd Brigade began pouring in. The stretcher-bearers were coming and going all the while. A tool-house was used as a mortuary for the time. The body of Captain Hughes, R.A.M.C., was brought in by a medical officer, undisturbed. Later on, it will be seen that the Boers stripped the dead and wounded of their accoutrements, and occasionally of clothes, for which, perhaps, some excuse may be made. About 150 wounded were dressed at the railway house. The medical officers attached to regiments carry no stimulants; there are none issued to them.

They have to depend upon the bearer companies, who may be a mile away. However, the civilian telegraph operators (Natal Government) kindly gave three bottles of whisky, which were most useful. All the wounded were carefully dressed, able to be sent direct to the field hospital. As the firing continued the confusion soon became terrible, press of numbers in a confined space, with groans and cries, made up an indescribably painful scene. A water-tank standing in the yard was besieged by men returning from the battle. The tap was locked, but the iron was broached, and the tank was speedily exhausted.

"On the order to retire, a number of our bearers, with stretchers, started off towards the Boer lines to bring in the wounded. A red-cross flag was frantically waved by them, but the Boers were, apparently, not ready to receive the men, and so fired at them, wounding two bearers. They and a stretcher-bearer, who was smashed by a shell, were our sole casualties. Later on we tried again to advance, waving the flag. A Boer thereafter rode forward carrying a small white flag. He handed me a piece of paper, on which was written in Dutch that General Botha's consent would have to be obtained before a man was removed from the field. Two or three hundred Boers then rode up, some of them old men, others lads little over fifteen years. An elderly Boer, with a red beard, seemed greatly excited. He said that Chamberlain had brought on the war

for gold ; but the Boers had no enmity against the soldiers, who simply did their duty. We English, he declared, treated the Boer prisoners disgracefully. In the middle of his harangue he saw one of the ambulance-men, loaded with field-glasses and revolvers taken from wounded officers. He thought that spoil too good to be missed, and rode up to the man, and, after an altercation, seized the lot. We were allowed to carry off Colonel Long, R.H.A., as he was seriously wounded, but Colonel Hunt, R.A., who was wounded in both legs, they retained. I dressed Hunt's legs. He refused to go, but was told he must, and that he would get the best of care and treatment. Lieutenant Bonham, who was taken prisoner, was standing without a helmet, and Major Waller, Colonel Bullock, and others were there. A number of dead mules lay about, but there were few dead horses. The captured guns were carefully examined by many of the Boers.

"When our ambulance arrived the field was searched for the rest of the wounded, many of the Boers helping us. Except for the red-haired man the Boers were agreeable enough. One of them was dressed in the uniform of the 'Staats Artillerie.' He did all he could to aid us, and a Boer parson who came up lent us some assistance. Nearly all of the enemy spoke English, though evidently they were Boers to a man. One of our medical officers became very indignant when Colonel Hunt was kept back, and the Boers made him a prisoner.

On intercession being made, the medico was, though with difficulty, allowed to go. We were told that we might be allowed to return next day to renew the search and bury the dead. The Boers declared that they had only had one man wounded the whole day, for whilst we were throwing lyddite into the trenches they were lying under the river bank. (The Boers, as I know, were lying then in a double sense.) It was quite dark when we left the neighbourhood of Colenso to return to camp. There were other wounded and prisoners in Colenso Railway-station buildings whom we were not permitted to treat or speak to."

CHAPTER XIX

A PERIOD OF INACTION

Frere Camp, January 5, 1900

We are grievously perplexed. Three weeks have spun by since the Colenso affair of December 15, and neither Buller nor his staff has given any outward indication of the date for the next advance in force. Officers and men are wondering at our prolonged inaction, and they would not be free-born Britons were there not grumblings and rough-tongued remarks in the camps about the unwisdom of a do-nothing policy. War is a stern game, and does not admit of over-specialized routine, regular meal hours, and *dolce far niente* camp life. Not that we have had much of the latter, for the vile weather has spoiled spirits as well as sport. Here's a sample: Last night it rained, thunderstormed, and the wind blew icily from the Great Berg. To-day the sky and the heat are of the tropics, and we perspire in shirt-sleeves, whereas last night we shivered in greatcoats and blankets. But, after all, we are campaigning, and the rudeness of the Natal

seasons makes some amends for the dull, weary sameness of military inaction.

That the irregulars want to be constantly at the enemy goes without express saying. There is no dilettantism about their methods of securing peace by making war. Action, action, action is their saving principle; and were they permitted, not an hour, day or night, would pass without plans for the worrying of the enemy and the lessening of the Boer muster in men and horses. So it is with our own cavalry and infantry. They are fidgeting to be at them, and perplexed to find out why they are so persistently held in leash. I suppose there is a drawback to everything, including drill and discipline. The Boer fights not by the book nor as Tybalt fenced. He is untrammelled by drill and discipline, and therefore uses his mother-wit, which often stands him in better stead than Passed Staff College credential. It is little good blinking the fact. Collegians often run in the ruts, and wide-awake common sense trips around them. On the whole, the battalion officers who cannot write P.S.C. after their names have carried off the honours of the war so far; and Tommy, as I have said before, has been sound and incomparably good.

When and how do we move? everybody is asking himself and his neighbour. The answers are uncertain and bewildering. But the simple-minded Kaffir judges with acuteness that there is something

afoot, and, with the timidity of his race, when the whites are stirring, is trekking southward. Yesterday and to-day this instinctive movement of the natives has been started, apparently without ostensible reason. And yet not so. Their keen eyes and ingenious minds have noted the preparation of transport, the seeing to harness, the shoeing of horses, and the loading up of waggons with the reserve supplies. Decidedly, the impending advance is near. To-morrow or Sunday should see the whole army of General Buller—now rather over than under 30,000 men, with many batteries—moving to force a passage of the Tugela. Shall we deliver one strong flanking blow, or again attempt, against all rules, two weaker turning movements? I know circumstances alter cases, and in human affairs there is no absolute guide. But though I feel sanguine that we shall drive the 12,000 or 14,000 Boers whom Joubert will manage to array against us from the path, yet, with a double turning operation, our arrival at Ladysmith may thereby be delayed for several days longer, perhaps, than is absolutely necessary.

Another hint that the Kaffirs may have acted upon is the increased activity shown within the week by our cavalry, regular and irregular. They have been going hither and thither, looking, so to speak, for a crossing and an opening, so that the infantry might be slipped at the Boers. As Sir Charles Warren has all his men here, as the

guns are on hand, and the supply columns are in readiness, I believe the army of General Buller will move forward within the next three days, and that an initial battle will be fought to secure a passage over the Tugela. The camp talk is that whilst Major-General Barton's brigade, with Bethune's Horse, holds the Boers before Colenso, Sir Charles Warren will march out with his 14,000 men from Estcourt towards Helpmaakar, and Sir Redvers Buller himself, with Clery's division, several thousand cavalry, and seven or eight batteries, will attempt to cross the Tugela at Potgieter's Drift. His objective thereafter will be the high ground around Onderbrook Hotel. From there he can effect a junction with Sir George White's forces, and roll back the Free Staters and Transvaalers beyond Eland's Laagte. I take it that Sir George White can still bring into the field eight to ten thousand fighting men of sorts. From the green rolling uplands of Estcourt and Frere there are no difficulties upon the march to Springfield. Two kopjes, which we can obtain in succession, should secure our lines of communication, and make the advance to Onderbrook Hotel fairly secure. These hills the gunners and troopers make no doubt of seizing. From Dornkop to Schwartz Kop they aver will be easy going, and the latter should give us the power to cross the Tugela at our leisure.

We may and do play football and cricket, and

have as many sing-songs as the Generals permit in camp, but we forget not home nor our commission to smash the Boers. Rather, these diversions help us in more ways than most wot of, mentally and physically. It does not do to be for ever at messes criticizing our leaders. Few people can come unscathed or untarnished out of the fire that flicks around a regimental meal-table, *i.e.* commissariat-box. There are four subordinate leaders whom the general consensus of opinion would have instantly recalled, and put almost anybody in their place. As for the poor correspondents, well-nigh like the lawyers, we thrive on grievances, and may have to adopt that for our motto. Some day our proper sphere—our just right to communicate with the public at home—will be accepted and recognized. Time and justice are with us. Meanwhile the military, with that disposition characteristic of our frail humanity, wish to be the authors and chroniclers of their own fame, and write their own despatches—whilst the public burns for the truth.

No matter, let that pass for the moment. Now we find that we are in the way of the Army Service Corps officials, who used to be the Commissariat and Transport Department. Had they not told us that we were entitled to draw rations and forage we should have had a transport department of our own, and impeded neither the fighting nor feeding departments. Now the fiat has gone forth that, presumably to make us draw

little or nothing from them, we shall pay at the rate of 4*s*. per day per horse. For that one can feed, stable, and have a horse groomed in Estcourt or Frere. Queerly humorous are the staff departments, giving sparingly with one hand and withholding with both. We have been here for weeks, and whilst these pen and paper elaborations go forward the camps at Frere and Chieveley have been left without adequate postal arrangements. This is no fault of the civil authorities, who would run the business at any moment. To get letters or packages one has to go hunting the camp post-offices, which are miles apart, farther than from Bow to Hammersmith. But these are trivialities, it may be said. Not so, away from home and friends, do soldiers or civilians view the receipt of communications from over the far seas.

One of the things here difficult to understand is why, when the 6-inch and 4.7-inch naval guns are so invaluable, more of them have not been moved up to the Colenso lines. The veriest tyro in war can understand that if Buller had had six or ten 4.7-inch guns firing lyddite on December 15 we might have smashed the Boer batteries, driven their men from the trenches, and seized Grobler's Hill with relatively little loss. Salvo and salvo of lyddite from such cannon would have devastated Fort Wylie and all the adjacent foot hills crowned by Boer sharp-shooters. It is the old story—divided authority. Admiral Harris and the Admiralty do

not like to let any more guns or men go from the fleet, and the military hesitate about asking, fearing refusal. Well do I remember that it was only as a fluke, a happy hazard, that on October 30 the two 4.7-inch and 12-pounder naval guns got through to Ladysmith in the nick of time. Had the Boers cut the communications with Colenso on October 29, as they might, Sir George White would have had to fight the enemy off with no longer range guns than the army 15-pounders.

At last our brigades at Chieveley have been actuated by the desire to pay back the enemy for several of his tricks. The irregular Colonial cavalry, in league with the Naval Brigade, have crept down towards Colenso and made as if to attack the enemy's lines in force. There has been an instant manning of the Boer works and trenches, a hot but harmless interchange of musketry, and then the enemy have been startled and driven back by a cannonade of 4.7-inch guns and the eruption of lyddite shells. These have by no means fallen harmless, and, tit for tat, the incidents of the Ladysmith siege have been visited upon them. Besides these incidents our scouts are waking up and avenging the trapping of the two troopers of the 13th Hussars. On more than one occasion Boers have been bush-whacked in turn east and west towards Hlangwane and Springfield. By the way, it is alleged the 13th Hussars' picquet, on the occasion referred to, was negligent. A corporal has

been tried in that connection, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. On Wednesday and Thursday squadrons of Colonial Volunteers brought in a number of waggon-loads of forage from Hatting's and Imbuschagne's farms, both of which are in the Tom Tiddler's ground near Springfield. In the little skirmishes consequent on these captures our men quite held their own. I am told that the Boers are very confident of keeping their lines against us. They still pursue their habit of signalling all sorts of questions. The other day it was flashed from Grobler's Kloof: "How's Mr. Buller? When is he coming for his next licking?" There is an interchange of martial chaff, and, I am constrained to add, strong language, in which even British Tommy is no match for the low, unfit-for-publication slang of the Transvaal Boer. To-day Colonel the Earl of Dundonald has gone with most of the cavalry and a battery towards Springfield. General Buller and his Staff accompany them. Fighting is almost certain, for it is part of the day's plan to seize and hold the hill which commands the crossing or drift at the junction of the little and larger Tugela.

CHAPTER XX

FIERCE BATTLE AT LADYSMITH

Frere, January 9, 1900

SOME failures are creditable, but most are otherwise. As to the first mischance that befell the attempt of General Buller before Colenso, on December 15 last, I have said all that is needed for a while, both by way of description and comment. This time everything indicates that Sir Redvers Buller is determined to make assurance doubly sure. Sir Charles Warren's division has been added to the strength of the command, and that, with General Clery's troops, brings up the number that General Buller can put in the field to over 30,000 men. There is, however, a paucity in the regulation proportion of cannon, even including the naval guns. This is the more conspicuous in that the Boer positions are strong in themselves naturally, and have been made much more so by numerous and well-placed defensive works. To shake the defenders and unsettle their marksmanship they

would, in the ordinary course, be hammered by a severe bombardment. That is scarcely possible under the circumstances, and I am inclined to the view that General Buller is not a devout believer in the supreme efficacy of the cannon's deadly roar and rattle. The stern infantry, with bullet and bayonet, can, undoubtedly, alone set the seal of victory on any great action, and the British soldier will not fail Queen or country when duty calls. But even in battle economy of life is no minor consideration. Why and wherefore we have made haste slowly to the relief of Sir George White and his garrison is, more or less, still the secret of the Generals. Until the causes that have contributed to the delay, and the nature of their plans are disclosed, criticism is absurd and impossible; but the determined assault made by the enemy last Saturday upon Ladysmith shows that we are not yet beyond the risk of accidents. Nor can even the cleverest military leaders eliminate all hazard of mishap.

To-day the second forward movement for the relief of Ladysmith has been begun, and that in the face of very bad weather. Last night, about nine o'clock, a violent thunderstorm broke over the whole district between Estcourt and the Tugela, probably extending to Mooi River and Ladysmith. The rain fell in torrents, and has continued without intermission. Until two o'clock this afternoon water has poured in sheets down the hillsides and slopes, flooding the ordinary dry spruits and river-beds

from bank to bank. Around the tents the ground has been pounded into quagmires, and the soldiers under bell-roofed or little patrol canvas shelters have had a damp, sorry time. Last night there was a curtailed "sing-song" in the Composite Rifle Battalion. Everybody who could sought shelter, but for the hundreds upon outpost and picquet-duty there was nothing better than blankets and great-coats, and trenches turned into water-holes. As little as possible can the elements be considered in campaigning, so, at an early hour this morning, through the rain and mud, Sir Charles Warren's division set out from Estcourt to join the two brigades here at Frere. One brigade and the guns came by way of Ennersdale—a round of twelve miles—whilst the other took the more direct road. They had a terrible time scrambling up and down the steeper slopes and wading through the spruits. The column which came *viâ* Ennersdale got in about 2 p.m., together with most of the cavalry and artillery. The gunners and horses had as much as they could do getting the batteries along. As for the second column, it was hung up for a while three miles out from Frere. There is a deep ravine at that part which can usually be crossed dryshod, but to-day the engineers reported the water ten feet deep in the spruit. Some fun was poked, later on, at the engineers' soundings when it was seen that an old farmer rode his horse across the drift, the water showing under two feet of depth.

Warren's men have come prepared for thorough soldiering, the whole division marching without tents. Indeed, it is the announced purpose of the General Commanding that the Relief Column shall move forward without tents, and with but a week's rations. The rain held off for rather less than two hours. It is now falling again, and shows every sign of lasting throughout the night. As for Warren's division, they have but the blanket and greatcoat, and must bivouac upon the wet ground. To-morrow, unless the weather upsets all of General Buller's well-kept secret plans, I hear the remainder of the army will move forward. The soldiers are all cheery enough—glad, I think, that the prolonged inaction is at an end. Their quarters hum with banter and song, suggesting the sound that prevails on a market day. The lads are drenched to the skin, to the marrow—surely campaigning with a vengeance! By that same capacity of undergoing hardship with a light heart their fixity of purpose may be gauged. English, Irish, Scotch, Welsh, all are alike eager to show the Boer that in British "rooineks" he has met more than his match. That petty prejudices at home should deny the meed of praise to such men, fighting to increase the surety and blessing of united Empire, seems inconceivable.

To-night the first portion of the Relief Force leaves Frere Camp, going out Springfield way. Cavalry, guns, and a supply column march together to seize and keep Swartz Kop, whilst the infantry

follow closely behind. A similar, and even more serious, demonstration will be made towards the east, or against Hlangwane Hill. There the Boers holding that corner this side of the Tugela must, with the river in flood, be completely isolated from their friends upon the north bank. Another chance is now afforded General Buller to capture the 1500 or 2000 Boers entrenched in that rough ground. We were to have carried the position upon a recent occasion, but the rapid fall of the Tugela restored the enemy's communications. To-day these are quite severed, the bridge of boats is gone, and the river quite unfordable, for the big Tugela goes roaring down in full. With Hlangwane in his hands, General Buller would turn the Colenso lines, and the 4.7-inch naval guns could send shells to Nelthorpe, or within the range of White's 45-pounders. The Royals and nearly all the cavalry leave us to-night, and the troops at Chieveley Camp are also, I learn, making ready at Frere. All extra blankets and stores have been called in and packed, and it may be taken for granted that to-morrow there will be sounds of battle resounding along the Tugela. Generals Lyttelton and Hart, with their brigades, go forward. The camps have all been put into a defensive state by means of trenches and small redoubts, so that the line of communications can be securely held by the troops already ordered to remain behind for that purpose. No enterprising or raiding bands of Boers can, therefore, take any

advantage of the movement of the army to the front.

Last Saturday something unusual was proceeding at Ladysmith. The sounds of cannonading and musketry reached even to Frere, for the morning was still and clear. Shortly after 2 a.m. the silence of night was riven by the heavy shock of big guns booming. The thunder of artillery was continuous, and swelled as the day wore on. Soon it was plain that no sortie was in progress, but some desperate attack by the enemy, who were, no doubt, seeking to forestall the work of the Relief Column. The heliograph was in operation, and General Buller quickly knew what was happening at Ladysmith. We, too, learned that the Boers had attacked the town on all sides, but that their chief effort was directed to securing Cæsar's Camp. That is one of the various Aldershot names given to spots around Ladysmith. The topography of that militant town, however, has no resemblance to this place, as Cæsar's Camp, Ladysmith, is a barren-sided, flat-topped hill, rising several hundred feet above the arid low hills, south or south-by-west of the town. It was late in the day of disaster and investment before that ridge, which is almost a mile long, was duly fortified. The position gives command of the town from the south, and would have uncovered the quarters of the troops screened amongst the bush and windings of the Klip River. Nay; it would have opened to sure gun-range the streets and buildings of

Ladysmith. Cæsar's Camp, therefore, had to be held at almost any cost to the garrison. Bravely, as it turned out, did the troops, though sore pressed, answer the call of duty and hurl back the assaults of the Boers. I rode over to Chieveley to be nearer the scene. As I have already explained, we Press correspondents have to camp at Frere, in the vicinity of the headquarters of the Press censor, who, in the present instance, is an affable, fair-dealing officer, Major Jones, of the Wiltshire Regiment. The hard orders of the day also forbid us to proceed beyond the outposts, or to accompany small columns or reconnoitring bodies of troops. In plain words, we are allowed out only when there is a general advance or big movement afoot. If Sir Redvers himself rides out with a body of troops we are forbidden to go abroad with the detachment. Our wires are held until the official despatches are prepared and transmitted. These have priority over all messages, and there is often a glut of three or five days' matter upon the cables, and so our wires run lagging far behind. But there is another kind of hampering to which it is useless to refer just now.

In order to create something of a diversion for the help of the Ladysmith garrison, the troops at Chieveley were ordered to advance as if to attack Colenso lines. In the morning and forenoon bodies of Boers were seen leaving the trenches before Colenso, and galloping up the Ladysmith road, no doubt to reinforce their assaulting column. Here

was a movement surely we should defeat and stop. About 2 p.m., therefore, a force of cavalry, three field batteries, and five battalions of infantry turned out as if to cross the Tugela. To help them the naval guns—45- and 12-pounders—began a heavy bombardment of the Boer lines. Lyddite and common shell were sent into Colenso, and over the river from Grobler's Kloof to Hlangwane the ground was searched, and missiles were exploded by the river and in the enemy's works, causing, I am certain, not a few casualties. The Boers, fearing serious work was at hand, came riding back into their trenches. They have dug their cover so deep that it affords shelter to their horses as well. As Lord Dundonald, who commands the brigade of cavalry, was instructed to send a force, extended with 500 troopers in front, towards Colenso, and to protect the flanks with other regiments, the 13th Hussars rode westward, and occupied a crest in the direction of Springfield. Thorneycroft's Mounted Rifles went towards Hussar Hill, which lies a little south of the spur of Hlangwane.

The men were directed not to attack without special orders, but the Boers only waited until the horsemen got near enough, and then they fired their Mausers at our lads—Tommies and Colonials—from behind garden and house-walls in Colenso, from the banks of the river, and the trenches upon its northern margin. Luckily the enemy's fire was erratic and high. Behind the cavalry marched the

infantry, and in the centre the three field batteries. The naval guns sent shell after shell screaming over our heads, picking out the spots where the Boers showed the most activity or curiosity. Major-General Hildyard employed three battalions, each of which advanced in widely extended and four separated successive single lines.

I should say the infantry walked forward, each man having his nearest comrade six full paces to right or left of him. With the stolid calm of the British soldier they trudged steadily forward up to and beyond the ground where, on December 15, the battle raged. The Boers poured a warm Mauser-fire out of their lines, but that made no difference to the steady, onward sweep. When they got within 1000 yards of the platelayer's house, close to Colenso, the men were ordered to take cover and go forward more slowly. Gradually they slipped in close enough to assist the naval gunners to clear out the few Boer marksmen from Colenso. Then the field batteries joined in the demonstration, limbering and firing from the west side of the railroad, not 1500 yards in rear of where Colonel Long's batteries had fought across the line a few weeks ago. With great rapidity and precision the gunners rained shrapnel and common shell all along the Boer position. Hlangwane and Grobler's Kloof came in for their share of the withering hail, but scarce a sign beyond their rifle-fire did the enemy vouchsafe. The troopers on our right, Hlangwane way, were

shot at by the enemy, but the two battalions marched out in that direction, so their supports were not engaged. Colonel Reeves commanded in that part of the field, his men consisting of his own battalion—the Irish Fusiliers—with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in support. Both battalions were in the same extended order as General Hildyard's, and, during the very one-sided action, lay prone upon the ground. At 5 p.m. the field batteries were taken on 1000 yards nearer the Tugela. From there, for over an hour, they knocked the Boer lines about without receiving an answer in kind; nay, even the enemy's rifle-fire fell away into insignificance.

About 7 p.m., when rain had commenced falling, and the Boers had again shown they were not to be further drawn, the troops were ordered to retire to camp. Lieut.-General Clery was in command, and, like the celebrated General in the Peninsular War, who rode in cocked hat to draw the fire of the French guns, he went beyond the infantry towards the Tugela in yellow puggaree, with his whitey khaki coat, and his attendant staff. Even his presence failed to rouse the Boers to battle. So Colenso No. 2 drew blank, but in quite a different manner from the earlier occasion, for there were no casualties on our side. Next day (Sunday) all was profound peace, and, no doubt, in Ladysmith and in the Boer lines outside they were busy burying the dead and attending to the wounded. We heard rumours that General White had 1300 casualties,

including fourteen officers killed and twenty-four officers wounded. On the other side 1500 Boers were accounted for, and Commandant de Villiers and many prominent Free Staters were killed. From Cæsar's Camp Hill the Transvaalers had been twice driven. Their neighbours of the Orange Free State had scoffed at their want of courage, themselves clinging to Waggon Hill, the south-west spur of Cæsar's. When the darkness and rain came together at 7.30 p.m. forward ran the Devons. Tight to their ground stuck the Boers, but into the trenches leapt the soldiers, bayoneting and stamping down into the two feet of water the wretched Free Staters. By order they had been put in the front of battle, and deadly had been their suffering. Several hundred prisoners were captured by General White's victorious troops.

CHAPTER XXI

BULLER'S MARCH TO SPRINGFIELD

Swartz Kop (or Potgieter's Drift), Monday, January 15, 1900

I HAVE been silenced, but not from choice, for nearly one week. Military requirements, with the menace of dire penalties, such as loss of our press license to peddle news, have restrained all of us alike, correspondents and soldiers, from wiring or writing from here. General Buller said that no wires, no messages, press or private, should be despatched from any of his camps; and we have all been dumb, but not blind. How strong the temptation has been to fill your pages with information is only to be measured by the power and sureness of the constraint put upon ourselves to keep mum, so that the enemy should take no change, at least out of loyal British journalists. We are on the eve of what we hope will be a successful battle for the life of Ladysmith, and so I am making up my chronological record to date, that I may have a clear field for the story of the anticipated action. On this occasion I will adhere to the almanack, and tell you what has

happened day by day since my last letter. I strove in that communication, as well as by cabling since, to give you a broad hint of what was impending in the conduct of the Natal campaign. We live in high altitudes, to which is probably due a certain exhilaration of spirits and a readiness of criticism and fault-finding at the course of events. Everybody and everything moves much too slowly to satisfy the onlookers, who enjoy that delight of egoism in watching the uncertain steps and blunders of others. Criticism abounds. Let us cry a halt. It is appalling to find there are so many ready-made generals marching with the troops. Providentially, few of them are allowed the run of the arena, to convulse humanity with their paces. So much in justice and fairness to those who are in command, and labouring on behalf of their country to prosecute the war to a quick and successful issue.

For days prior to Wednesday, January 10, it had been reported that Buller's next move would be towards the west and Springfield. Colenso was to be watched, not attacked, unless under special circumstances. To Major-General Barton's Fusilier Brigade was assigned the task of sitting still before Colenso. The two 4.7-inch naval guns, with a number of the naval 12-pounders, were ordered to be taken from Chieveley to assist in forcing the crossings of the Tugela. Sailor Jack, with customary wideawakeness, rigged up dummy, or Quaker cannon to prevent the Boers finding out too soon

that the tormenting lyddite guns had been removed. No army can march without much preparation beforehand, and the initiated soon discovered that a big movement was afoot. The orders for concentration were issued, and the supply columns had their instructions when to start and whither to proceed. For several days before a start was effected the destination of the army was discussed in a general way. How it was expected, with the district swarming with natives, and not a few Dutch farmers around us, that the news would be absolutely withheld from the enemy I failed to see. Nevertheless, all pressmen were formally notified by Major Jones that no telegrams would be allowed to be sent by any one during the next two or three days. The troops were going towards Springfield, and the object was to keep that fact from the knowledge of the Boers. Private as well as press wires would be placed under the same ban, and even the authorities in England would have to remain without news of what the army was doing for several days to come. In fact, just when the situation was becoming absorbing, we were to be "bottled up"; but, as there was no alternative, we submitted, with as little unnecessary effervescence as possible. So do good journalists, in times of trial, willingly sacrifice the interests of their proprietors and newspapers to oblige General Buller and what they are told are the interests of the country.

Wednesday morning was dry and bright. Major-

General Hart's brigade, which had been encamped two miles north of Frere, made an early start for Springfield. The Irishmen were in raptures at not being left behind to lose the chance of participating in the big scrimmage. Dublins, Inniskillings, and Connaught "boys" were gay and chirpy, going singing to war. They were veterans, and deserved their luck and opportunity to settle outstanding scores with the Boers. The unfortunate composite Rifle Battalion under Major Stuart Wortley might well enough, with others, stay behind to guard Frere Camp and the railway, but "Begorra! we die or mutiny rather than be left out of this next fight," was the concise sum of spoken Irish resolve. Imposingly, but impracticably, their General had his baggage-waggons move off ten abreast, but they tailed off into single line before anybody got far upon the road. Later in the day Major-General Hildyard's Brigade cut in from Chieveley, and joined the main column moving *viâ* the Frere-Springfield road. Sir Charles Warren's division had the worst shift to make of any, for they had at starting to cross the Blaauwkran's Drift, which was in muddy flood.

It was a prolonged and desperate scramble to get the men and about 400 waggons and non-descript vehicles down the steep, slippery bank, through the waist-deep stream, and up the sticky opposite slopes. Three ox-waggons were run down into the river and converted into bridge-piers,

planks being laid whereon part of the infantry were able to pass over dryshod, but the planks and footing were insecure in places, and it came to be like walking the greasy pole at Ramsgate aquatic sports, for numbers of Tommies went hurriedly into the water in the most diverse and eccentric manner, to the surprise of lots of people. The much-laughed-at score of Aldershot traction-engines did not stick or flounder in the mud, but lumbered about doing duty with comparative ease and considerable regularity. Their flanged grips upon the wheels gave them a sure bite of the ground, which in one or two places they churned up rather deeply. A by-no-means overladen ox-waggon stuck in the middle of Blaauwkran's Drift, close to Frere Station. Eighty oxen were tried, and were unable to move the waggon an inch. It seemed as if the whole column must wait until the vehicle was carted off. A traction-engine was requisitioned to try its powers; the enormous span of cattle were taken away, and a steel hawser was passed from the engine and made fast to the disselboom. Then steam was turned on, and with snort and whirr the steamer walked away with the waggon, conveying it some distance to a high and dry part of the roadway.

Hours that day and the next passed by in weariness. The tracks, by profound flattery called roads, were utterly blocked. Hundreds upon hundreds of waggons were jammed together in mile-long lanes; the baggage-guards and other bodies of troops had

to while away the time, and bivouac as best they could upon the open veldt. The scene of congested transport-traffic transcended the worst and dreariest blocks ever seen in Fleet Street or the City. It was an exciting and bewildering muddle of human helplessness wrought by stress of place and weather. Onlookers were entertained by countless diverting incidents. The erratic manifestations of animal nature are wondrous. No two creatures met the mud and flood in the same spirit. It was fun to us and to the camp-idlers, but to all who were struggling to press forward it was furiously exacerbating.

With desperate hardihood the Tommies braved both mud and flood. Through and beyond they trod, heedless of boots or khaki uniforms. The smart soldiers' clothes have lost their shine and neatness, and are now so bedraggled that a rag-picker might hesitate about appropriating them. For once in a while the men's boots have stood the test admirably, and show few signs of the hard wear they have been subjected to. Tommy has marched well, and I have heard of very few cases of sore feet. But nowadays Mr. Atkins is careful in his personal habits. You can see him at Frere, Estcourt, or wherever a bath is procurable, going through his *al fresco* ablutions: washing his clothes first, from socks to jacket, laying them upon the rocks to dry whilst he bobs about bathing in the muddy Natal streams.

This was an eventful day. Whilst the divisions

FEET INSPECTION AT ESTCOURT.

and brigades were moving westwards, Colonel Lord Dundonald set out, at 9 p.m., to seize the iron bridge spanning the Little Tugela, at Springfontein. It was not because of the importance of the district, or of the through-traffic ordinarily passing that way, that the Government built so complete a structure as an iron bridge over the boisterous Little Tugela. Their reason for going to this expense was good and simple. The drifts were few, and all bad when the river was up, and the bridge was a necessity for travellers and farmers. Before the column set out a body of Natal Mounted Scouts had made a wide circuit, and reported the neighbourhood clear of the enemy. The rivers being in flood, and rain coming on heavily again in the evening, the Boers had discreetly removed to the north bank of the Tugela. A party of scouts from Swartz Kop reported that the commanding rough hill was clear of the enemy. Swartz Kop stands to the east of Potgieter's Drift and Rope Ferry, rising to a height of 1000 feet, or thereabouts. Its rough, rocky sides, summit, and shoulders make it an easily defensible position. From Swartz Kop a grand panorama of the surrounding country is spread before one. Below winds the Big Tugela through sharply-cut banks in the low ground, and twisting in and around the hills on east and west, its course barely indicated by a fringe of trees on the rugged edge. In a sort of letter **W** convolutions it bends in front of Swartz Kop, forming, from the military point of view, a

dangerous and formidable entrance. Worse still, before troops could emerge from the tongues of land about two miles from the Ferry they would be exposed to a scathing fire from the front, both flanks, and the left rear. Plainly, if a crossing is to be attempted there, any enemy occupying Spitz Kop, on the west course of the north bank, would have to be first disposed of. When the news was brought to Lord Dundonald, instead of waiting on at Springfield for the infantry, he said that the cavalry would show what they could do in the war, and, taking with him about 600 troopers of the South African Light Horse and Border Mounted Infantry, with the 78th Field Battery, he marched over-night straight to Swartz Kop.

Arriving there at 6 a.m. on Thursday morning (the 11th), he seized the hill without opposition. On his calling for volunteers to swim the swollen river and bring over the ferry-boat to this bank, a party of G Squadron (Major Childes) South African Light Horse readily took upon themselves that task. Lieutenant Carlisle was in command, and down into the Tugela went with him Sergeant Turner, Corporals Cox and Barkley, and Troopers Howell, Godden, and Collingwood. The stream was over 100 yards wide and 20 feet deep, but they all got safely over and gathered in the cutting where the flat ferry draws up. Launching the boat they proceeded to work it across by the hauling-line and block. A covering-party of their comrades

lined the southern bank. The Boers, as usual, were speedily on the alert, and about fifty of them came as near as they dared and began firing heavily at the men in the boat. Very promptly the horsemen jumped back into the water, and their adventure would have proved fruitless, but Corporal Cox got back upon the ferry-boat and cut the hawser on the north side. Then the firing-party told off some of their number to haul in the craft, a task which, with some difficulty, was accomplished. To escape the rain of Boer bullets the men swam back to the south bank. The corporal was attacked with cramp, but Howell and the others stood by him and brought him in safely. Cox stayed for nearly two hours in the water to assist in safely securing the boat. Not a man of them was hit by the Boer fire.

There was a rearrangement of commands before Sir Redvers Buller set forward upon his present errand. Sir Charles Warren's division was made to include the Rifle Brigade under Major-General Lyttelton, and the Lancashire Brigade under Major-General Woodgate. To Sir Francis Clery was allotted the brigades of Major-Generals Hildyard and Hart, whilst Colonel Talbot Coke took charge of his brigade and a number of the Corps troops. Coke's and Barton's brigades were therefore relatively separate units. The big 4.7-inch naval guns were unshipped and packed in waggons and sent with the column.

Early in the day (Thursday) we saw and learned that Lord Dundonald had possession of Swartz Kop, for that officer speedily had the heliograph at work. General Buller rode out from Frere at 3 a.m. to superintend the whole of the movements. Hildyard's Brigade, to the headquarters of which Major Prince Christian Victor is attached, were the first to arrive at their assigned quarters. Pretorius Farm, a few miles south of Deel Drift, was the spot at which they were directed to pitch their tents. Whilst that was being done the battalions were led forward to the junction of the two Tugelas, which was found to be clear of any enemy. Vantage points were occupied, and in the afternoon the remainder of Hildyard's men settled down comfortably under canvas on the road towards Springfield. There were many mishaps and painful experiences with the transport column. Everybody wrought hard enough and long enough, but the condition of the roads and marshy drifts was much against them. A big engine sank down upon one side beyond an angle of 45 degrees, and had to be partly dug out. Oxen gave up trying, in places, and several horses lay down and died by the roadside. Whilst the mules, the egregious mules, revelled in the mud and water, yet I saw a dozen of them all but lost. They wandered into a quagmire, into which they sank halfway up to their stomachs, and only by desperate and exhausting struggles did they lift themselves through to *terra firma*.

Clery's Division halted upon the Springfield road two miles west of Pretorius Farm, whilst Warren's force pushed on to Springfield, near which they spent the night. The bridge was found intact, and was carefully guarded. There were the ultra-wise who feared in that incident of the unbroken bridge another trap laid by the Boers; but such timid views are, thank goodness, not shared by our leaders or men. Part of General Lyttelton's Brigade crossed to the high ground beside the farm buildings and Post Office. There was a difficult spruit mid-way which had to be negotiated afoot, though the water was over two feet deep. Once more the waggons were in trouble, but somehow, in the dark as well as in the light, one by one the transport was steered and hauled through from Frere to the Big Tugela. Westward the whole district is remarkably picturesque. The countryside is dotted in every nook and pleasant slope with charming and comfortable homesteads, but most of their owners have fled, and many of the buildings were sacked. Some of the farmers were with the Boers, but most were in safety at Durban or Pietermaritzburg, their household belongings a wreck and their farm and poultry-yards stripped. The Boers, however, had not taken away all the forage, although they had smashed the furniture and strewed the contents of the beds and sofas broadcast.

Pretorius Farm is an almost ideal Natalian residence, and will serve as a pattern for a description

of others. Snug stone buildings of one storey in height, roofed with corrugated iron sheeting, the whole begirt with verandahs, was what close inspection disclosed. Flowers and ferns blossomed in pots under the grateful shade of the overhanging trelliswork. Creepers and tendrils of passion-flowers and vines had woven themselves into parts of the buildings, and all is not told, for the homestead was embosomed in luxuriant tropical foliage, amidst which the tall, dark, odorous eucalyptus reared their tops. In a spacious, tangled garden and orchard grew grapes, peaches, and figs. Near the house was a small artificial pond, in size almost a lake, where scores of geese and wild fowls plumed themselves for several hours after we arrived; but, sad to relate, their numbers rapidly dwindled till all had disappeared, and we tried to fathom the mystery of clouds of down and feathers driving about the camp.

All continued to go smoothly, the Boers remaining quiet. They have been evidently taken more or less by surprise at Buller's having left the front and appeared over a score of miles from Frere upon their flank. It is no light undertaking to remove 30,000 men with cavalry, guns, and waggons so far from their true base, the railway. There were plenty of cattle and sheep in the country through which we passed, and it fails me to explain why the generals have been so slow to turn that raw material into fresh beef and mutton for the troops.

In the Soudan the Sirdar was more up-to-date, even though he had to transport and drive the herds for his men over 1000 miles. Thursday was a night of rain, but Friday turned out hot and muggy. Meanwhile the stream of troops and waggons followed steadily onward to Springfield, save Hildyard's Brigade, which held on at Pretorius Farm, ready possibly to bridge the Little Tugela and attempt a crossing of the main river near Deel Drift, but that is more or less contingent upon the Tugela flood lessening.

I rode to the top of Swartz Kop, and from there saw Mount Bulwana and part of the position held by our troops around Ladysmith. To the left rose the grand outline of the Drakensberg from Mont aux Sources to far north of Van Reenen's Pass. The peaks were silhouetted against the sky; waterfalls poured from their lofty, precipitous sides, and green foothills led in a series of Titanic stepping-stones to their base. Away beyond were the dim crests of the Biggarsberg and the Impati Mountain, near which Dundee nestles. Boer tents, waggons, and camps were ringed about Ladysmith from near Colenso and Onderbrook, where their main camp lies, and from Bester's Farm bands of the enemy's troops, mounted and afoot, hurried towards the hills upon their side overlooking Potgieter's Drift. Already there were Boers to be seen at work in their shirt-sleeves, digging trenches, piling up stone walls, and constructing small semicircular forts.

Every favourable bit of ground they could be seen inspecting, whilst hundreds toiled in every direction. Their object was unmistakable—to draw line after line of trenches, and to erect forts which would command every inch of ground from the river-front up to and beyond the crested ridges four miles north. Besides that, to the west they were crowning lofty Spion Kop, which rises abruptly 1000 feet from the Tugela, with defences and gun-positions upon its table-topped summits. Upon the east the ranges running west from Grobler's Kloof and Colenso, Doorn Kloof and Mount Borwick, were being prepared for defence.

It was deeply interesting to watch the streams of Boers moving and working like ants upon the opposite ridges. Surely 10,000 of them were gathered to dispute our right of way. I saw at least nearly that number; but much more satisfactory it was to note the attempt made by the winking heliograph from near Ladysmith to attract attention upon Swartz Kop. The day was clear in the afternoon, and the position of the big heliograph could be readily located. There was a division of opinion amongst the guides and scouts whether, from the position of the heliograph, it was our own people or the Boers trying to call us. The signaller asked who we were—British or Boers. When told, he desired to have the names of Buller's staff or key-words. That looked like entrusting too much without first learning who the

questioner was. The reply was, "Captain Walker, Chief Signaller." As I knew that gentleman intimately, it was arranged that I should draft a test message. I therefore prepared the following questions: "Who is Burleigh? Where did you see him last? Who represents the *Daily Telegraph* in Ladysmith?" The answers were flashed back instanter: "Yes; I know him. Is he there? I met him on the *Grantully Castle* when he was going to Madagascar several years ago. I don't know who represents him here, but I received a message from Burleigh for him through Weenen from Cayzer, and I have sent it round. If he has not replied I will send and get the answer and send it through you to Burleigh." That settled the matter to everybody's satisfaction, for probably no one in South Africa but Captain Walker, of the Black Watch, knew of my voyage upon the *Grantully Castle*, nor that I had sent a message *viâ* Weenen, and heliograph from Umbulange, to the *Daily Telegraph's* representative in Ladysmith but two days previously.

General Buller visited Swartz Kop with his personal staff on Friday (the 12th). As usual, an early riser, the General went off on Saturday to take up his head-quarters close to Swartz Kop, his camp being hard by the Spearman Farm, under Mount Alice. General Lyttelton's Light Brigade had been moved up the previous day (Friday) to reinforce the position at Swartz Kop. On Saturday afternoon the two big naval guns, with the Naval

Brigade under Captain Jones, of her Majesty's ship *Forte*, arrived. The cannon were unostentatiously placed in a handy hollow on the west shoulder of Swartz Kop, ready for turning on the lyddite when the hour for storming the Boer positions came round. The same day two squadrons of South African Light Horse, colloquially known as the "Cockimolly Birds," from the plume of chanticleer feathers they wear in their hats, set out towards Hildyard's camp upon a reconnaissance. They rode along by the bank of the Tugela. A party of Boers were seen trekking with waggons upon the opposite side. Shots were speedily interchanged, under cover of which the waggons withdrew, no casualties being sustained on our side. Captain Stewart, who was out with G Squadron, lost his way for a time amid the hills, and only got back to camp at midnight. Saturday was another quiet day. So was Sunday; but on both the Boers never slackened at their toil of trench- and fort-making for their guns, two of which are probably of large calibre. There is a suspicion that they have carried over their "Long Tom" from Mount Bulwana and another from Colenso.

To hark back somewhat, I saw on Friday and Saturday signs of Boer activity on our left. Away towards Springfield eight waggons, escorted by horsemen, moved rapidly across the low hills, disappearing behind a ridge. Since then there have been signal-rockets and fires seen in the same

direction. To-day (Monday) we have again heard and witnessed the recommencing of the bombardment of Ladysmith. The Boer fire, though it began early this morning and continued at intervals until the afternoon, has been desultory rather than heavy, and could be doing little or no damage. A party of our cavalry, with two guns, proceeded a few miles east along the river, where they caught and shelled a Boer convoy, bringing about something like a stampede. To-day one of the mounted patrols, venturing too close to the Tugela, was bushwhacked and killed by sharpshooters. The story is current in camp that by to-morrow's sun our batteries will be unmasked and the crossing of the Tugela at several points west and east of here begun. To-night the weather appears to have again broken up, and rain is falling.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW THE TUGELA WAS CROSSED

Potgieter's Drift (Tugela River), January 22, 1900

THERE has been one week of battling, fire, wounding, and death, without a decisive battle, but it is part of our new tactics to wear out and down the Boers' opposition with as little damage and loss as possible to ourselves. As I write the booming of our cannon resounds from Colenso to Waggon Drift and along the Acton Homes road. Natal is a country of magnificent distances, pleasing to the eyes, but fatiguing to body and mind when they have to be traversed so much. I and others realise this, for we have daily to journey on horseback eight or ten miles away to watch the progress of Sir Charles Warren's turning movement, and back here in the evening to despatch our very meagre wires descriptive of the fight. Chieveley and Colenso are relatively so unimportant for the moment —the force there being a mere stand-by, holding the line of communication—that I and others have

scratched that factor out of ordinary consideration; yet for days past General Barton's command there, and the naval gunners, have been bombarding and bustling those of the enemy in that vicinity who dare to show their heads or cross the Tugela to threaten a raid or attack on our posts. With steady shooting of cannon and rifles the Tommies have taught the Boers to be not too venturesome and to keep under cover. So, also, within the last few days even, the excitement of bombarding the Boer works opposite Potgieter's Drift by the big naval guns, and the hardy advance into the enemy's trenches under Brakfontein by Lyttelton's Brigade, has paled in interest before the bigger and more momentous operations being conducted by Sir Charles Warren to turn the Boers' right.

To that quarter have we ridden with exemplary regularity and buoyant hopefulness in order to be in at the big battle of the war; but day by day, although in all conscience the contest has been bitter and grim, it has not yet been on the grand firework scale which the situation and numbers of combatants arrayed against each other apparently warranted. Beyond doubt the Boers have far more men under arms than heretofore they have been credited with. They have well-nigh exhausted all the powers of commandeering. Every able-bodied male from fifteen to sixty—school-boys and old men included—has been ordered out, and foreigners have also been pressed into service. As the enemy usually

fight on the defensive, and are very mobile, that means our strength, under all military rules, should outnumber theirs at least three to one. We are to-day but little superior to them in numbers in this part of the country. As for cannon, it is little short of a scandal, after the lead the Sirdar gave the Woolwich people with lyddite and machine-guns—although the latter did not get to the front in the Soudan—that the Army artillery with Buller only comprises the 15-pounders and one 5-inch howitzer battery.

The week's campaign can be told concisely. On Tuesday, January 16, firing was heard around Ladysmith by us at Potgieter's, and we could see the big Boer guns upon Bulwana sending shells into the town. The sun was shining brightly, and the heliograph men were able to interchange messages with Ladysmith, which flashed back from near Bester's Farm to Mount Alice, or, as it will likely come to be known in future, Naval Guns Hill, which overlooks Potgieter's Drift. From there you see in a huge semicircle an amphitheatre of hills: Spion Kop upon the left, in front the lower range of Brakfontein, and to your right the spurs of hills running westward from Grobler's Kloof and Colenso. Spion Kop is a sort of Arthur's Seat in its way, with a table-capped top, furrowed and scored with dongas and protruding rocks, and streaked with walls and trenches. That was the barrier Buller was set to scale or break through,

in order to succeed in relieving Ladysmith. Naturally, the generals looked the ground carefully over and glanced aside to see if there was not some way round. Meanwhile troops and stores were being concentrated at Springfield, by the Little Tugela. The wily Boer was on the alert. However secret we fancied our movements had been, he was upon the hilltops watching us, and by means of beacon and grass-fires signalling in his own way our whereabouts, numbers, and doings.

Our naval guns, the two 47-pounders from Mount Alice, and the eight 12-pounders from a lower spur, had for days shelled the Boer lines. Swartz Kop and the adjacent crests only command the actual flat crossing at Potgieter's, not the encircling hills beyond the river bends. At 2.30 p.m. Lyttelton's Brigade fell in to force the passage of the Tugela. The arrangement was that two battalions should cover the crossing of their comrades. Slowly at length the long lines of infantry, in part extended and others in column of route, moved onward. Very steadily, where the track was obstructed by bush and rocks, did the troops defile towards the low ground. Accompanied by a few troopers to act as scouts, a battery and a small pontoon train, they wound down the paths among the wooded foothills leading to Potgieter's Drift and Ferry. The river was relatively high, and only just fordable below the inner bend, where there is an accumulation of boulders and four small grassy islets. As the troops emerged

from behind Mount Alice and came into view, the Boers began hastening forward on horseback to occupy their defensive works. Neither with invariable discretion nor astuteness were the soldiers led. In many instances their whereabouts could easily have been kept hidden from the ever-watchful, prying Boer, who has always, in this campaign, seen the enemy fail to play the war game. He himself is rarely to be seen, unless in the action, for he has mastered the art of keeping his dispositions an almost profound secret. Now he allows himself no rest, day or night, Saturday or Sunday, till he has built himself into dangerous (to us) security. We do next to nothing in that direction, and achieve the usual result.

Luckily for us, a brief thunderstorm came on, with rain and hail, at 4 p.m., and that served to screen for a time Lyttelton's operations. There were changes of direction, and what not, as the column advanced. On reaching the fertile flatlands—meadows, and ploughed ground hard by the river—the troops broke up into a series of lines, in snake-like form. The infantry proceeded towards the ford and the ferry. It was intended that the latter should be chiefly used, the few pontoons being merely for boating to and fro. But the Engineers could make no hand at first with the ferry, which apparently was a fixture. For over an hour we waited at the bank. At last a score or so of bluejackets, including some men of the

Colonial Naval Brigade, under Lieutenant Chiazzari, who knew how to work ferry-boats and ropes, went to the soldiers' assistance, and in a twinkling put matters to rights. Worse remained. The Engineers had gone down without ropes or stakes, both of which should have been used to mark the ford and assist the infantry in crossing. In a swift-rushing stream, with the water far over the waist, it is no easy matter to keep your direction and footing, and a staked safety-line would have been of the greatest help. Somehow the Engineers—that strictly scientific branch of the service—presumably well read in Army books, though you would rarely suspect it of many of them — knew less than nothing about the working of a hawser-ferry. Yet, rope-ferries are of ancient origin, and still in common use in many countries. Much has been left undone by the Engineers in road-making and mending. There is a conviction abroad that the meagre patching they do here and there could have been better and more cheaply carried out by a few score mechanics.

Whilst the ferry stuck, at 5 p.m., the Scottish Rifles and the Rifle Brigade went along the meadows and fields. A few rifle-shots were fired at them by the Boers. Two private soldiers—I wish I had their names—thereafter moved down the twenty or thirty-feet steep banks towards the drift into the roaring Tugela. They waded breast-deep, and, going from island to island, ultimately reached the

opposite bank. Then they returned to guide their comrades. Taking hands, with their rifles over their backs, and in double chain, the men slowly forded the Tugela. One or two came near drowning, and the chains were temporarily broken; but, although a rifle and a few cartridges were lost, the courage and resource of the troops saved their fellows from a watery grave. Broken chains were made good by men who had crossed rushing into the water to grab their floundering comrades' hands. As soon as companies crossed, they lined the banks until the remainder of their battalions were over. Then they advanced in attack formation for over one mile, and occupied a series of low, rocky hills reaching across the tongue of land upon the north bank, less than two miles from the main Boer trenches and forts. It was 6 p.m. before the first ferry-load crossed, but thereafter, the sailors having arrived upon the scene, half a company at a time were taken over, and by 3.30 a.m. all the horses, waggons, guns, and men had been conveyed across. There was a little sniping, but that was put a stop to by our men rushing the Boer trenches, which were found tenantless. The brigade, however, elected to hold only the first rocky ridges a mile from the river; the others, a mile further, being too directly under the main positions of the enemy. A slight diversion had been created in favour of Lyttelton's crossing by General Hildyard threatening to ford the drift. The operations were conducted without any loss in men or horseflesh.

Wednesday, January 17, 1900.

During the night a howitzer battery had been sent over by ferry to reinforce Lyttelton. At 5.40 a.m. the naval guns opened a heavy and searching cannonade upon the Boer works, ranging 47-lb. lyddite shells 11,000 or 12,000 yards from Alice Hill. Spion Kop was bombarded, and so was Brakfontein, and everywhere where the Boers were to be seen toiling at the construction of trenches or redoubts; and the howitzer battery chipped in, adding to the terrible din of cannons' roar, at 6.15 a.m. Volcano-like eruptions of brown cloud-dust and rocks were thrown high into the air wherever the lyddite shells burst, and their effect was visible upon the Boers, who skipped out of range of the deadly howitzers whenever possible. I saw a man blown into the air, as a Highlander tosses the caber from his hands, by the explosion of the 50-lb. lyddite shell in a Boer trench. There can be little doubt, from the accuracy of their fire and the swiftness of the enemy's scurries from cover to cover, that the artillery was doing much execution. Strange to say, the howitzers quite held their own with the big naval guns in the accuracy and destructiveness of their fire.

Whilst this demonstration was proceeding near Potgieter, Sir Charles Warren, with his guns and part of Clery's Division, advanced towards a drift near Trieghaardt's Farm, commonly so called, six miles west of Mount Alice. It was upon the direct

Acton Homes road, and led to the rough ground, foothills, and detached ranges behind, on the west of Spion Kop. The possession of these, it was trusted, would drive the Boers from the vicinity of Potgieter's, and Spion Kop must fall into our hands. By 8 a.m. Sir Charles had his vanguard on the flat land, leading directly to Trieghaardt's Drift. He personally selected suitable crossing-places, and within an hour afterwards had two excellent pontoon and trestle-work bridges spanning the Tugela, and a roadway cut into the bank. A few Boers from Trieghaardt's Farm buildings, spinneys, and orchards, as well as from a Kaffir kraal in rear, offered feeble opposition. A trifle of section-volleys and a dusting of shrapnel from Warren's guns killed and dispersed the pugnacious obstruction. By 10 a.m. Warren's columns had crossed the Tugela in strength, and the naval guns from Mount Alice had materially helped to achieve that result. The Boers dropped a shell or two, but they fell comparatively harmless. Firing practically ceased for a while about midday, and Sir Charles was allowed to get his troops quietly towards their intended bivouac. That night, at 9.15, we were allowed to wire home the first brief intimation of what had happened since our departure from Frere a week previously. During the night a few shots were fired from our batteries to bother the entrenching Boers.

BALLOON OBSERVATIONS.

Thursday, January 18, 1900.

This was a relatively quiet day all round. There were the wonted matutinal sounds of bombardment at Ladysmith and from Mount Alice. There was much proclamation of war and death by [illegible]. The balloon section, which had crossed Potgieter's with Lyttelton, sent up their translucent aerostat, and from the aeronaut we learned that he could discern as yet no guns in the enemy's works. Yet they were there all the same, but well hidden, as we knew from native eye-witnesses. That our advance was alarming the enemy was evident from the re-awakened vigour of their shelling Ladysmith all round, particularly from Mount Bulwana. In the afternoon our naval guns and howitzers hotly cannonaded the Boer lines before Spion Kop and Brakfontein. A few more of the enemy's were knocked about in their trenches, and again we sustained no loss. In order to see the demonstration made against the Brakfontein works I crossed the Tugela. I had the ill-luck, whilst trying to keep my belongings and saddle-bags dry, to have my horse wander aside from the ford and plunge himself and me into eight feet of water, with all my gear, books, and equipment. We had to swim for it—I alongside gripping the reins. Together we got out, wet and dirty, but not demoralised, nor a button the less.

With the Scottish Rifles on the left, the 60th next them, the balloon and howitzers to their right,

and, on the farthest flank east, the 1st Rifle Brigade, we went forward under a heavy fire. The troops advanced in excellent, thin, widely-separated lines. The howitzers made the enemy's trenches and walls reel, and must have caused many casualties, but the effort failed to draw the Boer gunners. So, after going ahead over a mile, the troops halted for the night. Our casualties were slight—two men wounded—so aptly has Tommy acquired the Boers' take-cover tactics. Lyttelton's Light Brigade longed to assault the works upon Brakfontein, but, as it was not down in the programme, their hands had to be stayed. During the day Warren was establishing his camp and position, so little was done in this direction beyond a series of brisk, prolonged skirmishes in the hills behind Spion Kop with sniping Boers.

We learned that Lord Dundonald, with 500 Colonial cavalry, had reached Acton Homes, and all but succeeded in trapping 400 Boers. Major Mackenzie of the Carbineers had, it seems, got leave to take a kopje, likely, as he thought, to be made use of by an oncoming commando. There was a gallop for the position, and the Colonials got there before the Boers, and unseen by the enemy. Dundonald made dispositions to surround them, but just as the Boers came up to within 300 yards an excited trooper of the Imperial Light Horse, it is said, fired his rifle and alarmed the enemy. Most of them galloped away back, but a volley from our troopers

killed eighteen Boers; and twenty-three wounded and unwounded prisoners were taken. Three were Free Staters, and the others were from Pretoria. The dead were counted, and the survivors all brought into the headquarters camp at Spearman's. Our total casualties were but two. Several important burghers were amongst the killed, including De Villiers, who was in Joubert's confidence. Three of the captured were Germans, and half of the eighteen wounded spoke good English. Most of the Boers expressed thankfulness at being taken, as they were now done with fighting for the war. Lord Dundonald asked permission to remain and defend Acton Homes, but was recalled by Sir Charles Warren to protect the left flank. A helio message had been received from Sir George White to the effect that a commando of at least 2000 Boers, with guns, were marching from Ladysmith to surround Dundonald's small force.

Friday, January 19, 1900.

There was more fighting to-day, but it also was unimportant, beyond leading up to a more serious encounter. Lyttelton had returned to his first line after having, during the night, with a rush and rattle of battle, carried the nearest Boer trenches. The position, however, was too close to the enemy's extensive and strong lines to be safe for so small a force. They sustained no loss whatever, for the Boers had vacated the trenches. There were

sounds of firing at Colenso and Ladysmith, but neither was out of the ordinary hammering. Our naval guns also took up their diurnal duty of knocking the Boer works and walls about, throwing shells astounding distances at waggons and horsemen crossing the veldt. Warren prosecuted his turning movement, sending his right and centre well in, whilst Hildyard on the left, with Hart's Brigade, moved forward. Clearly the object in view was to seize Bastion Hill, as we have dubbed it from its shape, and roll up the Boer right towards Spion Kop, over the direct Ladysmith road *viâ* Potgieter's.

Warren's outstretched lines of the previous day had been pulled in a little. General Buller and staff had, as customary, ridden over to watch what was going forward. But Warren was left all the same with a free hand. "Make haste slowly" would stand for his method of dealing with the Boers and their opposition. On the right Major-General Woodgate's Lancashire Brigade, with the 13th Hussars, were watching Spion Kop. Throughout the day there was sharp rifle-firing between the advanced parties on both sides. Although the Boers had all the advantages of commanding ground and good shelter, they were step by step forced back upon the outer semicircle of lofty ridges stretching from Fairview to Spion Kop. We sustained some slight loss, but bivouacked upon the enemy's ground. During the day Sir George

White's big guns' shells dropped within four miles of the farthest range of our naval guns. I learn that there are seventy special relief waggons filled with stores accompanying our column to Ladysmith. Mr. Goldmann and I have the *Daily Telegraph* relief waggon with extras here ready to go forward.

Saturday, January 20, 1900.

General Warren advanced his whole force and engaged in a very sure and deliberate battle against the strongly entrenched Boer lines. At daybreak the din began with the cannonade of six batteries, into which the naval guns from Mount Alice interjected frequent forcible clamour. The disposition of Warren's force was as before stated. Upon Hart's Brigade fell the brunt of the fighting, for they had to make progress upon the left. It was a long, noisy, ding-dong action, lasting from sunrise to sunset and even into the night, for of late the Boers have betaken themselves to the resort of the weak and despairing—sniping. By night they used their cannon with some effect against us, including several of the captured 15-pounders from Colenso. The shrapnel burst fairly well, and caused the death of the only officers—Captain Hensley, Dublins, besides Major Childe, of the South African Light Horse—who were killed. Our losses in wounded were heavy, amounting to over 200 officers and men. About eighteen men were killed. Happily the wounds are mostly trivial, and the medical

opinion is that the men will be fit for duty again in three weeks.

The story of the battle is too long and too full of details for this letter. One of the pluckiest deeds of the day was the act of Trooper Tobin, of the South African Light Horse, who captured the position of Conical Hill. He rode to the top alone, and finding but six Boers there, got his comrades up and secured that strategic point just east of the outer range called Bastion Hill. Since then Warren has been reinforced with men and guns, including the lyddite battery. The howitzers have sorely shaken the Boers, and the position is being slowly but surely wrested from the enemy. During the last few days, or since Friday, our total losses have been kept well down under the hundred. The troops are in excellent spirits, pleased beyond measure at being able to engage the Boers upon anything like fair terms. Our men's dash and dexterity are admirable.

CHAPTER XXIII

A WEEK OF BATTLES

Potgieter's Drift, Tuesday, January 23, 1900

THREE months have all but passed since Ladysmith was invested. I was never of those who believed that the Boers would be driven away within a week. There were no grounds, so far as I could see, for such a view. It would take, I ventured to think, at least a month to bring troops forward and prepare them to disperse the beleaguering enemy. That period has been considerably overstepped, owing to many causes : delay in arrival of reinforcements and material, and the advent of the wet season. In London I heard much, "on authority," as to the best time for marching an army in South Africa, and as to the ways and means of making a speedy end of the business ; but the differences between plans and practice, prediction and performance, have been wide as the poles asunder. Was the specially-garnered intelligence wrong, or, as I have heard asserted here, authentic and full, only the officials at home wilfully blundered in face of the stored

knowledge? From what has occurred in the field I am not disposed hurriedly to accept the plea that Pall Mall was kept well advised. The state of the official mind in London was like that of the gentleman escaping from Ladysmith by one of the last passenger trains. As it was creeping guardedly along near Nelthorpe, a station that the Boers could have tapped on October 30, bang! bang! bang! went something stunningly loud. "Ah!" he said, recovering himself, "it is all right now. There are the fog-signals to show us the line is clear." Whereat the other passengers howled derisively, and said, "It is the Boers' guns turned on us." And a second or so later, bang! bang! a shot passed through the upper work of the compartment, and the gentleman who thought they were fog-signals was, with others, looking under the seats with great earnestness for something they had not lost. On that and other occasions the ordinary train-drivers and stokers behaved with conspicuous courage, running the gauntlet of Boer artillery and rifles.

It may be a moot point whether it is truest wisdom in certain operations of war to make haste slowly. Wellington more than once successfully adopted that method, Napoleon rarely; but great commanders before and since Fabius have chosen to fasten their faith upon the tactics of delay. Let me break aside to say there is only one thing to be dreaded in this war, and it is dreaded by the military —that people at home may spoil all by tiring of it

and seeking to hatch another addled peace. The British soldier may take a time that seems unbearable to some folk, but he will accomplish the task set him.

Sir Charles Warren continued his steady daily hammering of the strong Boer lines north of Trieghaardt's Drift and Farm, just east of the Springfield-Acton Homes road, from daybreak until sunset. The mountains and rocks rang with the clamour of cannon and rifles. Six batteries of field-guns and the 50-pounder howitzer battery searched the ground, dropping shells in and around the Boers' countless trenches, forts, dongas, and hiding-places. Six or eight miles away to the east the naval guns, 12-pounders, and the two 4.7's from Mount Alice and near Swartz Kop, kept the enemy in front of Potgieter's Drift upon the alert. Lyttelton's Light Brigade, lining the detached hills north of the drift, also stirred them up with occasional demonstrations and rifle-fire. The balloon assisted in the manœuvres, and it chanced to get an ugly rip one day from a smaller Boer shell. The rent was quickly patched, but the supply of storage-tubes with gas to reinflate was, it seems, inadequate. Clery's division was practically incorporated with that under Warren, and the whole placed under Sir Charles's personal command. He had, I am informed, a very free hand from General Buller, who kept his headquarters at Spearman's, and rode over from time to time to look after the operations

taking place on his left. The scheme, as plainly as could be, was to turn the Boers out of the mountains west of Potgieter's Drift, and so free that flank, and leave the army a relatively open field for the march upon Ladysmith. The operation would, moreover, roll the Boers away from the direct roads to Tintwa and Van Reenen's Passes. Our success would mean the driving of the enemy—Free Staters and Transvaalers—eastward towards Onderbrook, Grobler's Kloof, and Bulwana. There they would have to fight us with their line of retreat menaced and their supplies possibly cut off, or use their greater mobility and hurry north to Eland's Laagte and Newcastle.

Warren had sent part of his cavalry around upon his extreme left, but Lord Dundonald, who commands the troopers, was not permitted to take them far in case of traps. Perhaps it will be said that they were needed in the hills; but that is nonsense. Our troopers cannot yet, like some of the Alpine and German specially trained corps, slide down mountains upon horseback. I am not seeking to minimise the work done by the cavalry—far from it; they have scored more than one of the undeniable small successes our troops have gained. The infantry for the rough ground, the horsemen for more open country. Yet have they also done good service as scouts and skirmishers—Regulars and Colonials—and even tackled the enemy posted upon hills; but then they usually went forward on foot when the Boers had to be dislodged by rifle-fire. I

saw the gallant Royals lining two miles of rocky ridges to protect Warren's right from any sudden incursion of the Boers from the mountain fastness of Spion Kop. One of the results of the operations of Friday, January 19, was to lead Sir Charles to pull in his left and stick more determinedly to the work of clearing the hills by frontal attack. Still, it was with his left that he pushed hardest with Hildyard's and Hart's Brigades—the latter thrown farthest forward. Woodgate's Brigade was upon the right, and in support. *Par parenthèse*, it is one of the peculiarities of the new Cape censorship that, not even after the act, are we permitted to wire which brigade or battalion or battery was engaged. Cavalry, infantry, and Warren's are the broad, wide phrases we must adopt.

There was heavy cannon-firing all along our and the Boer lines on the 19th inst., backed with much sniping and rifle-shooting. In the result Warren had advanced considerably and secured a firmer grip of the ridges. Our men had to bivouac, as before, amongst the rocks and upon the stony slopes of the Spion Kop clubbed ranges in front. There was a ridge within 3000 yards of the main crest, running east and west, whereon the Boers had concentrated in strength. The ridge upon our front referred to, having three mimosas growing upon the summit, was called Three Tree Hill. It was determined to advance at night and seize the position. Supported by Woodgate, Hart's Brigade marched

forward at 3 a.m., and four of our batteries, with the howitzers, acquired, almost without a shot, new, better, and more defensible ground. Following up that success at 6 a.m., our guns began sharply, from Potgieter's to Trieghaardt's, bombarding the Boers. During the night, as I have indicated, there had been some "sniping;" but the Boers dread the dark and British bayonets so much that they did little harm. Upon no occasion have they waited voluntarily until our men could cross steel with them. To incontinently bolt has also been their unvarying practice whenever our shell-fire penetrated to their lurking-places.

After a heavy bombardment the brigades began to advance slowly. Woodgate's men faced partly to the east, as well as north. Hildyard's Brigade went forward to menace the Boer right and turn the western ridge called by us, from its marked shape, Bastion Hill. Major-General Hart, waving his sword, was leading his men on once more in rather close formation for the work in hand. The Irish Brigade, full of undamped ardour despite the miserable night, bore onward with the rattle of musketry, independent and volley firing. The noise was as that of a heavy battle. The Boers contested every inch of ground and rock-cover, but gradually were forced back. Again and again there were wild Irish rushes and cheers, and bit by bit the position was improved, and the advanced parties linked together. The Boers used

their cannon, our lost 15-pounders, their Creusot guns, and the nerve-racking "Pom-pom" Maxim-Nordenfelt cannon, which whirls a score of shells into the air, hurtling to make havoc at almost the same instant.

Once more the 2nd Dublin Fusiliers got into the thick of the battle, and, as a consequence, suffered rather severely. Faultlessly brave little Captain Hensley, with whom I have been often in the armoured train and afield, was killed outright, shot in the head. Another officer or two of the regiment were wounded, and a number of casualties occurred amongst the non-commissioned officers and men. But there was no thought of flinching or turning back in the Irish Brigade: and Inniskillings, Connaught Rangers, and Irish Fusiliers kept what they took, and asked to be led forward to get more. It was their day out, the men said, and they were for paying the Boers back in kind for compliments passed at Dundee, Ladysmith, and Colenso; and they did in considerable measure, shooting with rapid and good aim at the Boers firing from trenches and walls. With the least luck, and the support of the rest of Clery and Warren's men, they would, I fancy, that day have won the whole line of Boer works.

Shortly after noon the firing upon Warren's left came closer. Towards the centre the South African Light Horse, under Major Byng, were skirmishing towards Bastion Hill, trying to come up with the Irish Brigade that had by this got well in upon the

centre. The Boers clung about the kopjes and dongas, firing in murderous fashion at all detached bodies, but retreating or lying low whenever threatened by infantry in numbers or shaken up by our shrapnel. These sharpshooters were well-nigh as elusive as the air to the grasp of the hand. The Colonial troopers crept in upon Bastion Hill. Its slopes are like a glacis and its long summit as level as an earthwork. Trooper Tobin bravely rode his charger to the top, and, being mistaken for a Boer, was fusilladed and nearly shot for his daring act. Finding the crest unoccupied, he waved his feathered wideawake for his comrades to advance. In a few minutes Bastion Hill was ours, and the pressure upon Hart's Brigade was much relieved.

Advancing along the slopes the troopers came under a heavy fire of musketry, and were hustled by the Pom-pom gun's shells. Major Childe, leader of "A" Squadron, was shot through the body, terribly shattered, and instantly killed. He was formerly in the Royal Horse Guards, and latterly was in the Shropshire Yeomanry. Strange to say, he had a fixed presentiment that he would be killed that day. Only the night previous he had confided to his friends the conviction that his end was near, and he would not again escape alive. They tried to laugh him out of the belief as an idle fancy; but, although he bantered them in turn, he assured them the decree was certain, and begged them, as a favour, to put these words of Scriptural quotation, besides his

name, upon his grave, "Is it well with the child? It is well." Next day he was buried in a rudely-fenced-about grave. Upon a wooden headboard was the text quoted and the name, "Major C. B. Childe, killed January 20, 1900." From the battlefield that day many kind friends and gallant men found resting-places among the silent ones, but yet not to utter silence, for their lives remain eloquent. Lord Dundonald read the funeral service over Major Childe's body; they were once school-fellows. Youth to full manhood the steps are not so wide apart when looked back upon, and there were sobs and tears in that sad last farewell, and I think the service was read or thought out to the end.

Let us turn away from these new-made graves, where there were no firing-parties, but only wet, weary eyes for Hensley, the Dublin "Boys," and many more, as there were for Childe; and Father Matthew Collins and the other clergymen gave such comfort to mourners as their creeds afford.

By 3 p.m. on January 20 Hildyard had established his left flank. A commando of 500 or more Boers threatened his left, and caused a halt for a while; but nothing came of the menace, and the enemy had to retire and keep to their hills. With bursts and lulls the battle drawled along throughout the rest of the afternoon, until it dropped to sleep about sunset. The "Body-snatchers," as they are irreverently called—namely, the 1200 men of the

volunteer ambulance recruited in the Natal towns—did splendid service. Their behaviour was as brave as at Colenso. Forward they went up to the firing-lines to assist in bringing in the wounded, and, as at Colenso, they paid the penalty of their devotion. Several were killed and nearly a score wounded, for the Boers never hesitate to fire, regardless of Red Cross flags, upon all and sundry at the front. They have, however, more than once, to our knowledge, sheltered their movements and fed their fighting-men by means of the Red Cross ambulances. One of the volunteer stretcher-bearers—a man named Robertson, an ex-coffeehouse-keeper in Durban—whilst calling to his comrades to "Come on, and never mind the Boers!" was shot through the head with an expanding bullet. The wound was terrible and immediately fatal. Our casualties ran into hundreds — probably they were about 50 killed and 300 wounded. I will add that the whole week's fighting, up to date, has cost less than 1000 in total casualties.

Whilst Warren, with whom I was, kept pushing on, Major-General Lyttelton demonstrated with two battalions of his brigade against the Boer lines before Potgieter's Drift. They went forward towards the enemy's trenches as if to attack, but halted near the second line of low ridges, 1500 yards short of them, and engaged in a lively interchange of rifle-shots. It was never intended to do more than keep too many Boers from leaving the position

to withstand Warren, and possibly in that respect the movement succeeded to a modified extent. The rain-storm that set in about 4 p.m. on the 20th inst., though of brief duration, helped to taper off the fighting for the day.

On Sunday, 21st inst., the bombardment of the Boer lines was duly resumed. The same field batteries, 13th, 63rd, 7th, and 78th, with the 61st howitzer battery, shelled the enemy's lines from Three Tree Hill, and in front of it. As the trees afforded too good a landmark to the enemy, they were cut down. About 11 a.m. the troops again began pressing forward, coming into short ranges from 800 to 400 yards from the Boer trenches and cover. The Dublins, under Colonel Cooper, on their own account raised a yell, and carried a small trench upon their front with the bayonet. Mr. Boer had spent his night fortifying himself more deeply than ever. Sir George White had signalled that the wily enemy was reinforcing and bringing up guns. Sir Charles Warren estimated that they had two big Creusot guns, two 15-pounders, besides some of our captured field-guns, two Pom-pom cannon, and numerous Maxims in their works opposite him. Our men were cheery and well satisfied. It was a reasonably fair game of war. "Not like Colenso," the soldiers said, "where we were in the open and the Boers all hidden. We can now take cover as well as they, for it is here to take." Very well, indeed, did many of the battalions now advancing

from point to point engage the Boers at their own particular game, and the Boers have confessed that our men's fire is deadly, and that they had no idea Tommy could shoot so straight.

The day was excessively hot, and the troops had to fight under a really blistering sun, but they never faltered. General Hart was, as before, in the van, telling his men that the Boers could not shoot for nuts. In order not unduly to expose them he sent most of his Staff back under cover: one of them, absolutely worn out with the heat and over-exertion, had a slight sunstroke, and had to be treated. Amongst the not severely wounded were Colonel Bruce Hamilton and Major McGregor, of General Clery's staff. The Devons, with another battalion and two batteries, moved out upon the plain to the left (west) to deal with a second supposed flanking attempt of the enemy. As before, it was effectually checked. One poor man Father Matthew told me he had seen and spoken with, a private soldier. "Where were you shot, my man?" asked the clergyman. In a rich brogue, unimpaired by his injuries or facial bandages, the Irishman, for such he was, answered, "I was shot in the head. It took my left eye out, carried it into my mouth, and I spat it out with three teeth." He did not seem to mind much, and will, I learn, recover. "But we gave it to them Boers, this time, and I am content," he remarked.

That Sunday was a day of biting rifle-fire, and

one had to cling close to the rocks. A companion who was lying low said to some one who wished to use his field-glasses, "Oh, you may have them altogether. I don't want to look any more."

On the 19th and 23rd insts. there was bombarding and small demonstrations made by General Barton's Brigade, lying at Chieveley, against Colenso, but only a few of his troops went out upon either occasion. On January 19 half a troop of the South African Light Horse advanced towards Robertson's Drift, which is nearly opposite Grobler's Kloof. Acting under orders, they went close up to the river bank, where they came under a fierce fusillade. Seven of their horses were shot in a detachment of ten troopers. The three other troopers galloped back for assistance, whilst the dismounted men took cover and returned the Boer fire. Our infantry advanced, but did not get close enough to afford the whole an opportunity to retire from the position at the end of the day. Only one other got away, and the remaining six, of whom one or more were wounded, were made prisoners by the Boers. Something of the same kind very nearly occurred on the 23rd in a reconnaissance towards Hlangwane; but the troopers on that occasion, although under a telling fire, managed to escape with the help of their own comrades. On January 22 three companies of rifles made a little demonstration from Potgieter's in the interests of Warren's advance, but it was an unimportant affair. Tuesday,

January 23, was much as the other days in the day-by-day fighting of Warren's command, yet progress, though slow, was made. It was, however, not a hard day for the men, but rather one of relatively easy going. A party of signallers was nearly cut off. Five of the men so employed during the hard days of fighting were wounded, and one was killed.

So, down to the evening of January 23, stands the chronicle of war with Buller's force.

CHAPTER XXIV

SPION KOP—BLUNDERS AND DELAYS

Potgieter's Drift, January 25, 1900

THERE are sad hearts, angry souls, humbled and raging spirits everywhere—in the officers' as well as the men's quarters of General Buller's force. And for a good cause. Yesterday, with great toil, endurance, and sustained heroism, part of the troops by night assault carried Spion Kop, the rugged, lofty southern ridge of an irregular mountainous chain, beneath which winds the Tugela. In Basuto tongue it is called "Thaba Emunyama," the black mountain. Thaba Emunyama was the veritable master-key of the military situation, and, as I saw, had been won and kept in the most hardy manner. For nearly a week there had been a certain beating about here and there upon our left, six miles west of Potgieter's, with more or less desperate fighting daily, amongst the lumpy, rock-strewn foothills and sprawling mountainous shoulders of the main chain, which has its crests 1500 feet and more above the rushing river. The troops

had made way five miles or so, the desperate Dublins (Fusiliers) always in the thick of the fray. But at the end of our guns we were still confronted by large bodies of Boers, whilst the curved lines of General Warren's corps—for Clery was acting under him—were endangered as they grew weakly long. Add to that the risk run from the hump-backed and rocky ledges of Spion Kop and Thaba Emunyama, which menacingly overlooked Warren's right, nay, his whole disposition. To Sir Charles had been entrusted the difficult task of clearing the ranges of the enemy upon his more immediate front and left. Generals Lyttelton and Coke were to have held and threatened the Boers from Potgieter's. Coke's Brigade was, however, withdrawn three days ago and sent to reinforce Warren. With wise deliberation General Warren had set about his work. Making haste slowly, perhaps, it could be urged, too guardedly, he was careful of his men, and with relatively small losses daily forced the Boers back step by step. Then it was decided to do that which, but for our caution or courtesy, could have been more easily accomplished a week earlier. But this may seem captious.

The time has come when the truth must be written without hesitation or regard for individuals. A most serious crisis has arisen in the conduct of the war. It depends upon how the difficulties are grappled with whether the war will be brief and victorious for our arms, or prolonged, sanguinary,

and pregnant with consequences which probably none can foresee. I will disclose my mind and feeling in the matter. When, after returning from the vicinity of Spion Kop yesterday, where I interchanged a few friendly observations with Sir Charles Warren, regretting, among other things, the lack of more and better cannon and a balloon, all was well upon Spion Kop. The ridges had been cleared of the enemy. Their excellent artillery was comparatively quiet, and we were establishing our hard-won ground in solid strength, sending up engineers and guns. It was 6 p.m. when I left to cross the Tugela and get back to the wires at Buller's headquarters, eight miles away. Almost needless now to say, few or no facilities are afforded journalists with this force either to collect or to transmit news. We are placed at least two miles from the headquarters camp, beside smallpox-invested native kraals, and have to ride that distance to and fro when telegrams have to be sent, in order to get the Press Censor's sign-manual for the matter permissible upon the wires. And there has been another official censor set up at Cape Town, *viâ* which, by "order," all our telegrams must be sent. I have told you already that the Natal Government Telegraph's officials have, on more than one occasion, signified their readiness to the General to lay lines accompanying the force afield, and deal at once with all military and private work, without restriction as to number of words. But, "No," say the military; and now,

with capable soldier-telegraphists, the best of apparatus, they daily flout us with the observation, "The wires are crowded." We cannot, as a rule, send more than 150 words a day, but sometimes, as special favour, 350 are allowed us. To be exact, I should state that we may go back to Frere, a score of miles, and, with the Censor's approval—that is, the General's—add another 200 words on great occasions.

It is all downright nonsense, or something else, this so-called preventive means against wire-blocking. General Buller has the right, which he and the military nowadays invariably use, of signalling "Clear the lines"—*i.e.* putting aside all messages until his despatches are sent through. But more is done; the military absolutely keep back all our telegrams from the wires until their own despatches are most deliberately written out and sent off. More than once in this Natalian campaign have our messages been absolutely refused, or not transmitted for days in succession. Recently we were bottled up for a whole week, although the Boers knew all about the Army's movements. But where is the use of a Press Censor if he cannot erase information in "wires" that might assist the enemy? Neither in the German nor any army—no, nor upon any campaign I wot of—have such stringent measures been taken with correspondents in the field to burke their communications. There is such a thing as living in a fool's paradise of exclusive official

despatches, as the public may some day in costly panic find out. To-day I had seriously contemplated sending, on my own and others' behalf, the following telegram to the Prime Minister and Colonial Secretary :—

"Sir,—Time has come when our country's paramount interests force us to protest against the unreasonable, persistent tampering with and suppression of war news which we believe to be of vital importance that the public should know. The facts that we seek to disclose are such as are fully and daily known to the enemy, but our people, whom they far more deeply concern, are kept in total, probably fatal, ignorance. We raise no complaint of personal nature, although causes for such exist, but the obstacles interposed to our discharge of grave public duties at this juncture compel us to withdraw from General Buller's field force, and, in order to regain our freedom as correspondents, to proceed to the confines of civic government."

We have preferred to remain with the troops, but, none the less, endeavour to have our grievances redressed, awaiting the issue with patience and confidence.

On Tuesday, January 23, there was a conference among the generals upon the field towards the close of the day's operations. War, somehow, ultimately adapts itself to periods and measurements of time on our side, which the Boer, not perhaps ungratefully,

falls in with. We begin hammering at daybreak, lull up about 9 a.m. for a while for breakfast, then from noon or thereabouts till 1.30 p.m., and on again until near sundown, when everybody, by consent, prepares for dinner and such rest as veldt and rocks afford. It was decided to take Spion Kop, advancing in the night up to the southern shoulders of Thaba Emunyama. To Major-General Woodgate was assigned the onerous responsibility of capturing the position. His brigade had been moving along upon the right, whilst General Warren was endeavouring to turn the Boer right by seizing the ridges overlooking the Acton Homes road. About six o'clock in the evening the assaulting column paraded. It consisted of Thorneycroft's mounted infantry, the Lancashire Fusiliers, one company (the 17th) Royal Engineers, six companies of the Royal Lancashire, and two companies of the South Lancashire Regiment. Colonel à Court, of Buller's Staff, accompanied General Woodgate. Without native or other guides the force proceeded in the gloaming down the slopes, moving rearward along the deep dongas, to get upon the south side of Thaba Emunyama. Painfully going forward, scrambling over boulders and rocks in the darkness, the column, in two thin lines, silently, slowly neared the mountain. No smoking, no talking—the orders not to fire but use the bayonet—the men held grimly onward. Almost every man carried a rifle, including General Woodgate.

Two days earlier I had said to Colonel Burn-Murdoch, of the "Royals," whose dragoons were guarding Warren's extreme right, that the Boers had neglected to place guns upon Thaba Emunyama, or to hold it in strength. Pointing to it, I had suggested that three of his troopers might creep up in the daylight by the reverse slope and see what was happening. There were, it is true, a dozen places along the mountain's sides where a few men could have defeated hundreds, and made half a dozen Thermopylæs against as many armies. On slight incidents great issues oft revolve. Reaching and beginning to scale the almost precipitous sides of the mountain—for in the cheerless, misty, starless night the troops did not hit off the easiest ascent—a large white spaniel came up and began capering around the head of the column, where General Woodgate, Colonel à Court, and Thorneycroft were. What was to be done with it, for it was worse than the dog upon the racecourse? A single yelp from the animal would have betrayed the column to the Boers and to defeat. It could not be shot nor safely knocked upon the head. The trouble was solved by giving it to a soldier to pet and fondle, a string was put around its neck, and it was quietly led off. Whenever a difficult part was reached, Thorneycroft went ahead with two or three of his men to discover the best way of surmounting the obstacle, or ascertaining if Boers lay behind interposing ledges. General Woodgate, though far from

well, had persisted in leading his men. In steep places he had, in several instances, to be pushed and pulled to assist him onward.

From 6 p.m. until 3.40 a.m., in the thin rain and chilly mists, toiling along, the force had marched, the distance altogether not more than six miles. They were near the top, by a flat where grow half a dozen or more dwarf but bushy mimosa trees, now covered in yellow-button blossoms, sweeting the air with their perfume. The Lancashire Fusiliers had taken their place in the front for the crucial moment, and the summit was near. Suddenly, through the ghostly mist, a piping Dutch voice cried, "Halt! who goes there?" Some officer, probably General Woodgate, yelled back, "Waterloo!"—the countersign. Instantly there were forks of flame, and a dozen or score of Boer rifles were discharged within fifty yards into the faces of the soldiers. Hastily the enemy fired, emptying their Mauser magazines, as hurriedly, with cheer and shout, the Lancashire lads and their comrades bounded forward up over rocks and boulder to administer the bayonet. The Boers ran off, scattering in all directions; but Lieutenant Audrey managed to bayonet one in the trench, who, perhaps, was slower than his fellows to cut, and one or two others were caught in their flight by the men.

Behind a wall further on five Boers lay hid, trying to use their rifles. They also broke away. Colonel à Court tried his Mauser pistol, but the

safety-catch was set, so, grabbing a big stone, he bowled one of the Boers over, hitting him over the head. Then, the mountain-top cleared of Boers, the engineers and men set to work to construct trenches for holding the position against any attempt of the enemy to recapture the place. Ammunition and guns were sent for, and preparations made for keeping the mountain which, as Colonel à Court assured me, could have been "held till Doomsday against all comers." Happily, too, a spring was discovered, so that there was no lack of water. For four hours the work of trench-making proceeded without interruption. The howitzers, and two of the 15-pounder batteries, with Warren's corps, near Fair View, west of Spion Kop, in answer to the musketry, began shelling the neck of land connecting the northern with the southern spurs, to check any attempt of the Boers to send reinforcements across to attack Thaba Emunyama. From above Potgieter's the naval 4.7-inch guns later on helped to guard the same passes against intruders.

Daylight came tardily. Banks and wreaths of cloud and mist clung to the mountains, lazily waving their fleecy fringes in the idle air. The mist had helped us; it was now the Boers' turn. Through it crept the best of the Free State marksmen. From behind great rocks and boulders they commenced at dawn potting at our men, who had neglected to explore and occupy the whole crest up to the northern neck. The twenty or fifty Boers

swelled in numbers. Their mode of skirmishing was ingenious. Whilst a mere handful, a dozen or more, were sniping, the majority sat with their backs against the rocks, under safe cover, holding their rifles between their knees. Whenever our men sought to make a forward rush, then all the Boers instantly became alert, and joined in potting, as fast as they were able, the soldiers running in upon them. With the clearing away of the mist and the growing light, the crackling of musketry swelled into one continuous roar. Amongst the first to fall were Drummer Greig and a private of the Fusiliers, both killed with explosive bullets. Many such were used against our men. From front, right, and left flanks the Boer marksmen sniped at long ranges from the safe cover of trenches, forts, and rocks. At 6 a.m. their guns began playing upon the mountain. Few or no guns had the Boers when we reached Potgieter's, but the weary delay had given them time to construct trenches and forts, and to drag over guns from Colenso and Ladysmith. Sir George White had also sent a message by helio that the enemy were reinforcing their lines with men and a number of guns. From 7 a.m. till dusk the battle had made changes. Through it all our soldiers behaved like heroes, with a courage and dash that none could surpass. Rained upon from three sides, a hellish tornado of fire, of bullet and shell, that pierced and shattered our soldiers by scores, again and again they would

run, charging forward, as desperately in face of death as ever did the fiercest of Dervishes. They were man and man upon their mettle, and it rang through and through, exquisite as true-tempered steel. Glory and honour to them, who only needed leaders and direction! All that flesh and blood could do, and more, they accomplished.

It was not alone the deadly "Pom-pom," the Maxim-Nordenfelt machine-cannon of the Boers, bursting a trail of twenty or more shells suddenly and almost simultaneously in their midst, they had to withstand; they were harrowed and ploughed with 6-inch shells and shrapnel from the captured Colenso 15-pounders. And the tale of their endurance is not told. By some cruel mischance our own gunners burst their missiles amongst them. Blame not the gunners unquestioningly. Things had been done in a hugger-mugger fashion, and they had no precise information imparted to them as to the object and scope of the day's operations. Later they were, for the most part, quite unaware of the movement led by General Lyttelton, which resulted in the capture of the northern spurs of Spion Kop. The consequence was that the Scottish Rifles and the 3rd King's Royal Rifles suffered from our own shrapnel bursting over the reverse slopes. It was not until 5 p.m., when General Warren arrived upon the scene where the batteries were, that their fire was stopped. In war, more than all else, cohesion of purpose, co-operation, and combination are well-

nigh indispensable. Therein our professionals should have far excelled over the Boers. Therein, as with our guns—howitzers excluded—we have signally lagged behind them. From far and changing ranges the enemy's cannon ever and again battered our troops lying in the trench or among the rocks of Thaba Emunyama. But, try as they did, our gunners could not locate the positions taken up by the enemy's artillery. They searched the ground far and near with shell-fire, shrapnel, percussion, and lyddite. The wily Boer, with his more modern cannon, long range, and possibly greater art in hiding, had things his own way. His two or three Maxim-Nordenfelt were worth all our six batteries, and more when it came to the crucial stage of rapping advancing infantry, besides offering our gunners no mark or indication of their whereabouts.

About 10 a.m. General Woodgate, whilst giving instructions to the firing-line, close to which he stood all the time, was shot in the eye. He fell, and turning, said, " I'm hit." From the first it was seen that the wound was mortal. The volunteer ambulance-men, recruited in Natal, chiefly from ex-Randites, were early upon the hill with Major Walters. With conspicuous bravery at Colenso, Fairview, and Spion Kop they have borne wounded men almost from the firing-lines to the field hospitals. They also have had their repeated toll to pay in killed and wounded, for without hesitation the Boers have fired upon the Red Cross flags and ambulance-

bearers. General Woodgate was attended by a surgeon, and then sent down the precipitous slopes of Thaba Emunyama. He lived, but was unconscious, for several hours. Colonel Blomfield, of the Lancashire Fusiliers, who took over the command at once, sent for ammunition and reinforcements, saying that, without these, it would be impossible to hold on. Major-General Coke, about noon, was ordered up the mountain with his brigade. Meantime, a stream of wounded men, some in stretchers, others walking or hobbling along, assisted by comrades and ambulance-men, were coming down the mountain-side. Mules with ammunition and food were in another line creeping upwards. Under the dip, where the mimosa blossomed, a temporary dressing-station was established. Another, with two big flags, was placed amidst an outcrop of rocks on the south-eastern face. In smoke, dust, and danger how the surgeons and their assistants wrought to alleviate suffering! Their labours are worthy an epic. There the Army surgeons, here Mr. Treves, at Ladysmith, Estcourt, and elsewhere distinguished civilian physicians are more than seconding the efforts of the P.M.O. (Principal Medical Officer Gallwey) and his staff to save life and limb.

The Middlesex Regiment, the Dorset—the latter in their dark khâki or chestnut—and the Somerset, under Major-General Coke, went forward to scale the mountain and save the situation. Coke became

the division leader, and Colonel Hill, of the Middlesex, looked after the brigade. Upon the plateau beneath the trees grazed a band of captured Boer ponies, and thither wended the toiling reinforcements. An artillery officer had been sent up by Colonel à Court with a helio to signal to the batteries below, so as to direct their fire. But it was late in the day ere he arrived, and there was evident want of better signalling arrangements, by flag as well as heliograph, between those upon the mountain and the troops around, whether of Warren or the Naval Brigade upon Mount Alice. And still the din, the awful diapason of battle, clang and broke in volcanic bursts through all. Men stormed and swore, sweated and wrought, bled in gushes, fell silently in death, or were blown to pieces; and meanwhile the Tugela gurgled and sang over its rocky bed, birds twittered in the trees of Trieghaardt's deserted homestead, and the turtle-doves cooed in the orchards their everlasting love-songs. They vexed the strained air and nerves, for were not our countrymen unsparingly giving their life's blood in a cause worth dying for?—England and Liberty against the crass Boerdom of the Middle Ages.

Major Walter, in charge of the ambulance, sent out of the trenches with his men to look after the wounded, was hit and badly wounded. And the fight raged. Half a dozen times our men went forward to the northern shoulder of Thaba

Emunyama. By 3 p.m. we were firmly set amongst the rocks overlooking the long, sloping neck where, maybe, a score of Boers or more found cover. Their slaughtering "Pom-pom" was unable to loosen our grip. As there were too many men on the mountain, the Dorsets were sent down—a prudent measure—and only the Middlesex and the Colonials (Imperial Light Infantry) remained with the remnant of the assaulting column. The screw-guns of the mountain battery were proceeding to scale the hill, and Lieutenant James, R.N., with two naval 12-pounders, hoped to get there also and deal with the Boer cannon raking the summit. Colonel Crofton of the Fusiliers had his wish, and men enough to hold the position. Thorneycroft's Colonials were doing their share. Sergeant Mason, an ex-Glasgow man and Durban hansom-cab driver, did some fine shooting. He, and other Colonials by adoption, are crack shots. Whilst potting Boers at 1500 yards range, he chanced to turn, and saw three creeping up the mountain-side upon his left rear. Dropping his sights he bowled one over, the man falling across a rock and never stirring, for he was shot through the heart. An instant later he fatally wounded the second, who tumbled headlong downhill. The third caught sight of his helmet and rifle, and dodged behind a boulder. Then a duel ensued between the twain—Sergeant Mason and the Boer. Every time Mason tried to peep round the Boer banged at him. The Sergeant

returned the compliment. Five Mauser bullets were put through Mason's helmet, cutting his hair once or twice, but leaving him uninjured. Others came perilously near his throat, arm, and hands. Finally the Boer drilled a hole through Mason's shoulder. Wounded, he changed the rifle to his left, resting it upon the rock. A lucky shot of the Sergeant's touched the Boer, who fell forward with his head between the rocks. Then Mason "made siccar," putting a shot or two into the head, which never budged. Weak from loss of blood Mason arose, retired, had his wound dressed, and then walked out of the action.

Great things were happening on the Potgieter's side. Under General Buller's direction Lyttelton's light brigade advanced westward against the eastern slopes of the more northern spurs of Spion Kop. Covered by Bethune's Horse, about 4.30 p.m., the Scottish Rifles, and the 3rd King's Royal Rifles, advanced into the open to climb the conical hill and table-topped peaks. The Binterfontein and other trenches had been emptied to reinforce the Boers upon the larger ranges. Bothered with very little fire relatively, the Rifles, in pretty business-like skirmish-lines, briskly advanced. Their Maxims were well handled; so, indeed, were those of comrade-soldiers upon Spion Kop and on the western slopes. Under fire from our own shrapnel and the Boer batteries they hastened upward, onward. Boer Mausers did them some mischief, but nothing

like the vexation of the shell-fire. The naval guns supported their admirable feat. Undaunted, the Scottish Rifles and the old 60th did their duty, and gained the almost impregnable positions. Being on the spur farthest north and nearest the enemy, the 60th had the hardest lot. Their commanding officer, Colonel Riddell, was killed; and ere the order came later for them to withdraw from the hill, their total casualties numbered nearly 100, including four officers killed and five wounded. The capture of the northern spurs, had there been guns of ours upon Spion Kop, should, and I believe would, have settled the Boer game, and opened the road wide to Ladysmith for General Buller's army.

When I left the western base of Spion Kop, after 6 p.m., all was well. The gun and musketry-fire was almost quiescent. Only at rare intervals did the "Pom-pom" break in, and as for the rifles, only the relentless snipers were shooting. The wounded were being brought down in hundreds; and, as I have said, the Mountain Battery was, with the naval guns, on its way towards Thaba Emunyama. An hour and a half later a disastrous change set in. The green troops, who had never been under fire, must, I suspect, have been shaken by the subsequent whirlwind of Boer shells and bullets that descended upon the mountain. I dislike to name any body in particular, Regulars or Colonials, for both for weary hours behaved magnificently, and means might have been more promptly

adopted for helping them. The stories of scare and stampede, whether of the raw Imperial Light Infantry levies, or certain of the Regulars, may be brushed aside as unworthy of credence. That in the darkness a thawing and melting process set in, I can believe, but it was induced and aggravated by another circumstance—what I dare to call a fatal blunder. Seeing that the 60th were in an exposed situation, where they could afford little help in the task of clearing the Boers off the hills, and that they would come under the shell and rifle-fire of both sides, an order was sent them to retire.

Therein lies the mystery and crux of all that ensued. So far as I am able to glean, the order in question was simply addressed to the "O.C." (officer commanding). But that it was meant that the 60th should withdraw to the south and join the Scottish Rifles, as some say, seems open to question. What appears to have happened is this: In the death or absence of Colonel Riddell, Colonel Thorneycroft took the message, and read it to apply to the whole force upon the Spion Kop range. A retirement, which may have been a retreat, followed, and by 10 p.m., when the rifle-fire dwindled into sniping again, Thaba Emunyama was practically evacuated, only a handful of men remaining under the dip by the mimosa trees. There were those, I learn, who refused to take the order; but whether Major-General Coke acted upon it or not, we are all alike, officially and unofficially, in the dark. The

37th Company of Royal Engineers had also been ordered up with the guns to further add to the defences of the mountain. Whatever may have been the case in Warren's camps around Potgieter's and Spearman's, we were in blissful or deplorable ignorance that the position had been evacuated, and was then occupied by the Boers. Thursday morning, 25th inst., told its own tale. As General Buller was setting out to ride over to Warren's force he, for the first time, heard of the disaster. Yet, as I have pointed out, the distances separating us are not great. There is a military telegraph wire, and from Buller's headquarters Thaba Emunyama is well within lamp-signalling range. Why, we have been here long enough to have laid and run a light tramway from Frere, which would have reduced the convoys, revolutionised transport, and made it incomparably easy for the surgeons to have sent the daily hundred or more sick and wounded to rail and hospitals in Maritzburg. Now they have to be jolted thither in ambulance and ox-waggons.

I dare say General Buller was dreadfully shocked and mortified. He rode off with his Staff, and has since spent the time with Warren's troops. Many of us imagined that, even then, victory would be wrested from defeat, and an attack made all along our lines upon the Boers, for more, rather than less, the fate of Ladysmith was trembling in the balance. But no; merely an occasional gun and rifle-shot. Through glasses I could see hundreds of Boers upon

Thaba Emunyama. A few helmeted Tommies moved about amongst them. The enemy could be seen picking up Lee-Metford rifles and cartridges, and assisting in bringing in wounded and dead to our dressing-stations and ambulances, some of which were upon the mountain. Their own ambulances were also busy collecting their wounded. Our loss is probably over 200 killed, and the total casualties quite 1600.

Several of the Boers had ridden on horseback up the mountain. General Louis Botha was there, showing we had been fighting the Free Staters. He was rather irate, and at first declared he would keep all the wounded in his own hands, and our ambulance-men, until we surrendered twenty-five prisoners taken at Acton Homes. Major Wright, of the Gordons, in charge of the Ambulance Corps, palavered for over an hour and a half, and ultimately Botha let them all go. He bade them, within twenty-four hours, remove themselves and all hospitals south of the Tugela, or he would fire upon them without exception. There was an armistice agreed upon, extending to-day from 10 a.m. till 4 p.m.; but it was long after that hour ere the last of the dead were buried, and the wounded brought downhill. Our men declared that they buried over 100 of our dead upon that part of Spion Kop, and saw at least fifty dead Boers.

Late in the dusk of evening the baggage and supplies-columns were sent back over the Tugela,

both in Warren's and Lyttelton's forces. This foreshadows a retreat all along the line. But two things remain—either we must stand and fight, warning Sir George White to co-operate and cut his way out, or we must abandon him and Ladysmith to their fate. Which will it be ?

Latest, January 26th (Friday), 1900

Nothing could have been grander than the scaling of Spion Kop by the Scottish Rifles and the 60th, of glorious reputation. They dashed at and won the hills. They got within 150 yards of the farther Boer works and trenches, and begged to be allowed to go at them. But the order had come to retire. The men declined to stir, saying, "At terrible cost they had won the mountain," for the Scottish Rifles also lost heavily—three officers killed, four wounded, and seventy-seven men killed and wounded. Thrice was the order repeated, and the news communicated to them that our troops upon Thaba Emunyama had retreated. Major-General Grove was away, and Colonel Thorneycroft had just taken his men away, and was followed by Colonel Crofton, commanding the Lancashire Regiment. The troops are concentrating here. I am just informed that our communications are cut between here and Frere. A body of 500 Boers have seized Doorn Kop; but I make no question they will soon go, or be cut off. I am sending this by special messenger, and trust it may reach you and catch the outgoing mail steamer.

CHAPTER XXV

RETIREMENT FROM SPION KOP

Potgieter's or Spearman's, February 1, 1900

"ONCE more unto the breach." There are signs of and preparations for another immediate advance. General Buller has declared, in as many words, to the troops upon parade, that Ladysmith shall be relieved. Not beaten, but angry and sullen the men were led back from Colenso and the Spion Kop. I have written more than once telling how eagerly the soldiers have sought to be allowed to go on and fight their way forward. Why, I well-nigh credit the remark, that if we were to say to the army, "Fall out, to-day, lads, but be sure and fall in to-morrow afternoon at Ladysmith," they would set to work in their own way and get there somehow, and in time. That may be only an indication of the measure of my faith in the average Mr. Thomas Atkins, but I have seen quite enough of late to confirm me in my good opinion of that individual's disinterested and steadfast valour. Since the withdrawal of Warren's and Clery's

divisions from the north bank of the Tugela at Trieghaardt's Drift, they have been living apart and resting. Sir Charles, who commanded both bodies of troops in the week of battles, has his quarters five miles away, near Springfield, while Sir Francis Cornelius Clery is encamped with his two brigades two miles due west of Spearman's Farm. During the last two days, by means of substantial drafts from home—over 3000 men having arrived—the numerical losses by war and sickness have been made good. The 14th Hussars have come in to swell the mounted branch of the service, and there have been arrivals to fill up the ranks of Regulars and Colonial troopers. Buller's artillery has also been added to by a battery of 5-inch siege-guns, and also a Field and Horse Artillery battery respectively. To-day Coke's Brigade had been moved over towards Potgieter's to be nearer the point of attack, and the cavalry have gone out upon the low ground, where they can be more quickly used to demonstrate or turn the enemy's flanks.

There is much that needs full and patient inquiry in connection with the Spion Kop disaster—of things of omission as much as of commission. A heavy knock administered to the Boers, or a sharp and decisive victory, such as we all hope for, would, mayhap, relegate useful inquiry to the Greek Kalends. But that ought not to be, for, as the future belongs to our nation, it must not lose thought of the past. In a time like this carping

criticism seems hateful; but here is none of it, only the account of what has actually happened. Colonel Thorneycroft was, by General Buller's direction, placed in command upon Spion Kop after the terrible wounding of General Woodgate. When, after the weary day's hammering and pounding from Boer shells, night fell, the question of retirement from Spion Kop was discussed by Thorneycroft and some of the commanding officers. It is said there was a division of opinion, and the casting vote was left to Colonel Crofton, of the Lancashires, who gave it for withdrawal. The men had suffered terribly, and there had been more than once counsel raised for retirement. Unfortunately the single trench made upon Spion Kop in the dark had not been dug in the right place, and throughout the long day, even in the firing lulls, the soldiers failed to take advantage of the time to dig with their knives and tins rifle-pits or erect stone defences, either of which would have afforded almost sure protection against the enemy's shrapnel and quick-firing cannon.

True, there had been havoc wrought, and the sights were gruesome upon Spion Kop—mounds of heaped dead slaughtered by artillery. But soldiers must needs accustom themselves to that sort of spectacle. Many of the fatal casualties were caused by the enemy's shell-fire, the "pom-pom" in particular doing most hurt. Men's bodies were dismembered and shattered, the place being

a veritable shambles towards the afternoon, and all for the simple reason that means were not taken to secure good cover. A few of the men found protection by piling their dead comrades' bodies before them. Somehow, our soldiers, by dint of perverse training, have imbibed the idea that there is something cowardly and sneakish about sitting behind cover in the field; or, at any rate, if they have to get into trenches and works, it is the Royal Engineers' province to provide these defences. From Father Collins and others, who assisted in burying the dead and removing the wounded from Spion Kop, it has been gathered that 243 bodies of our soldiers were laid in the trench and covered up. The work they had so stubbornly defended was turned into their grave. From some of the Boers it was ascertained that their exact loss in killed was 151. That does not include 200 slain, on their own admission, upon the other parts of the spacious battlefield. The enemy assisted, as I have already said, in removing our wounded and burying our dead, but kept our ambulance people from going near their own men or helping them in any way. As usual, the Boers professed to deplore the war, which they said was made by the capitalists. They would rather return to their farms and enjoy peace, but they meant to fight and be at us until we were tired and gave in. God Almighty was with them, and they were quite sure of victory.

One of the brilliant feats of the day was the upward rush of the Scottish Rifles. Two battalions in front were hesitating about facing the tornado of bullet and shell. With a resounding cheer they bounded forward, and at a critical period in the afternoon retook and re-established the possession of Spion Kop in our hands. It was one of our blunders that there were far too many troops sent to hold Spion Kop. Well-entrenched, 500 men could have bidden all the hosts of the Boers defiance. Unless it was meant to send them forward to clear the enemy from the ranges at once, it was obviously an error to have so packed the mountain-top and sides with nearly two brigades. Had the troops but waited throughout the night until the guns and Engineers arrived, the whole situation of affairs would have been completely changed. I met the Mountain Battery, on the evening of the battle, on its way up. The naval guns were a little further off, and the Engineers were also on the march. Then I and everybody thought that the firing had been practically finished for the day, and that Warren's preparations for the absolute holding of Spion Kop would be carried through before morning. That, in that event, the Boers must beat a retreat all along the line none could doubt. It was about 7.30 p.m. when Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft began putting his order into execution. The men retired gradually, and were in no wise, it seems, pressed or attacked by the

Boers. By 9.30 p.m. nearly all of them had withdrawn from the summit, but a force still rested under the dip of the hill near the trees. The sharp rifle-firing everybody heard was from another part of the battlefield, and was solely due to a scare of a night-attack in the Boer trenches and camps.

I have said that General Buller knew nothing of the abandonment of Spion Kop until dawn upon the following morning. He was then mounted, and proceeding, as usual, towards the battlefield from near Spearman's, where he has still his headquarters. The distance was about six to eight miles. During the night, or, rather, at 1 a.m., after the battle-day, the 3rd Battalion King's Royal Rifles were also ordered back by Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft. Now Sir Charles Warren had given no instructions for the evacuation of either position, and, like Buller himself, was in total ignorance of what had been done in so surprising a fashion. Indeed, as I have shown, he was carrying forward means for the more complete possession of Spion Kop. I have told you also that in the morning, after daybreak, the enemy could scarcely credit their senses that our soldiers had left the hill-top. "Where are the soldiers?" the few Boer scouts who rode forward under the white flag asked our surgeons and ambulance men. "Gone!" "What for?" And subsequently it leaked out from several of them that they thought the position was lost, and they had begun trekking.

There was talk amongst the leaders of renewing the attack, but the recovery of the wounded was in progress, and daylight would have disclosed the attempt to the Boers in ample time to have caused the assaulting columns terrible losses. So the scheme came to nothing, as did proposals for pushing in the left flank attack. There were sore spirits and cross tempers elsewhere, that and the next few days, than amongst the rank-and-file and company leaders. When the retreat was ordered Buller waited by the single part-pontoon part-trestle bridge, until everybody was got safely across. The day previous he had critically re-examined the positions held upon the left, and been repeatedly under the fire of the snipers. Indeed, at least one of the Generals and several of his staff had to get him to retire behind cover, as they thought he was unnecessarily risking himself.

I have some further details of our losses upon and around Spion Kop. You will find the letter-estimate of 1500, though still officially disputed, is not wide of the mark. The dead were 243 upon Spion Kop ridge alone. There was no great difficulty in counting them, for the men were heaped in corners, where they had been slain by the shells. One of the Army reforms somebody should turn their attention seriously to, is the modification or the abolition of the Royal Engineer branch of the service. It is a startling proposition, but hear the plea therefor. As railway experts and

telegraphists they are neither as smart nor as useful at the work as the trained specialists of civil life, who can always be obtained in time of war. The field-companies of Royal Engineers absolutely stand in the way of doing that which every soldier should be taught to do for himself, promptly and swiftly, upon the field, *i.e.* constructing trenches, rifle-pits, walls, or whatever defensive or aggressive works may be requisite. Each infantry battalion carries trenching-tools, a Scotch cart with seventy spades, and so on. These are ample for all ordinary purposes, but the knowledge that trenching is your Sappers' special job, delays ready resort to these implements. All ordinary field-work the battalions should themselves be able to execute. Let there be 50 or 100 skilled men, chiefly accustomed to building operations, and a sailor or two included in each regiment. See that the men are trained workmen and given a higher rate of pay upon enlistment. Most of them, no doubt, would soon rise to the dignity of corporals and sergeants, but that would be a further gain to the service and to their usefulness. Save for ballooning, and one or two other highly technical branches connected with warfare, the big army of highly-paid engineers could be curtailed with profit to the Queen's service. I have only hastily outlined my view, but distinguished officers, to whom I have spoken upon the subject, agree that there is much to recommend the proposed reform.

Except for the occasional shelling of the Boer lines before Potgieter's Drift from the naval guns upon Mount Alice, there has been nothing doing. The shells are distributed about, so that, wherever Boers are seen congregating or digging some new gun-pit or trench, they have a taste of the explosive force of the common and lyddite-shells from 12-pounders and 4.7 cannon. I see that, at last, the batteries are being increased to the east of Mount Alice and Signal Hill, and two guns are being placed upon Swartz Kop. These will, in a measure, enfilade the enemy's trenches at Brakfontein and across the Ladysmith road. Spion Kop will also come under their long-range, raking fire. The Boers are in a state of alarm, as may be judged from their watchfulness. General Buller's plans are to keep them on the tenterhooks as to his next move. On Tuesday a cavalry reconnaissance proceeded west to Honger's Poort, but they saw little of the enemy. This morning the troops at Chieveley have been again demonstrating, and there has been heavy artillery fire directed against the Colenso lines. In the language of one of the West Yorks, when he saw Buller's fine army, abundant artillery, and excellent cavalry, "I pity poor Kruger now!" The force here is in splendid condition, and there should be no hesitation or doubt of the final result.

CHAPTER XXVI

ANOTHER ATTEMPT

Potgieter's Drift, February 4, 1900

Sentiment is a quality to be reckoned with in war. In an instant the humdrum view of things taken for over a week in camp has been brightened, and the troops have been heartened because official pronouncement has been made that to-morrow the Army will again give battle to the Boers. All ranks are jubilant, for every man is imbued with the sentiment that the honour and glory of carrying relief to Ladysmith must be won at once at any cost. This time the soldiers are to be allowed to get at the enemy wherever he can be reached, and, further, the troops are to be smartly and adequately supported throughout the day by batteries and cavalry. General Buller personally will supervise and direct the whole field of operations. Here is yet another ground for satisfaction, and for the expression of the hope that the superiority of the British arms will be triumphantly vindicated. The

rest at Potgieter's has been for recuperation and concentration, and the preparation of plans for a fight to a finish. Everywhere there are evidences of this new influence at work in the bearing, brightened looks, and cheery chat of the men.

An outline of what has been done may help to render clearer, later on, the conduct of the action. An effort is to be made to engage the enemy's attention along their front opposite Potgieter's Drift. There may even be a serious attempt to storm their stronghold at Brakfontein by a frontal attack. The ground thereabouts is relatively low compared with the mountainous chains of Spion Kop upon the west, and the ranges abutting from Grobler's Kloof upon the east. Between these is a space six to eight miles in width of comparatively flat, hillocky land. Over it passes the road to Ladysmith. Later on in the day, from masked batteries, a flanking attack may be delivered from Schiet Drift, and a resolute bid made to carry the lofty tableland of the Doorn Kloof. General Clery's Division has proceeded in the direction of Schiet Drift, where he will be helped by the three regiments of Regular Cavalry, placed under the command of Colonel Burn-Murdoch, together with artillery. Around Potgieter's Drift are in watching Warren's Division, consisting of Generals Lyttelton's and Wynne's Brigades—Colonel Wynne having succeeded to General Woodgate's command. Lord Dundonald, with all the Colonial, or Irregular Cavalry, is to

back up the attack from Potgieter's. Including the naval guns, in all seventy-two cannon will be employed to-morrow in a preparatory bombardment of the Boer lines. As closely as can be estimated, the enemy have mounted, in opposition to us, some twenty guns and many Maxims, behind very strong works.

One day has been very much like another since the troops returned to encamp near Spearman's. The weather, in all conscience, was damp and depressing enough, without the surroundings of crowded quarters, idling parade, and no recent big victories to discuss over and over again. That Buller had the key to Ladysmith we all believed, and fervently trusted it would fit the Boer lock. Yet there was compensation in the rain, for it filled the spruits and ensured the needful water-supply for men, horses, and cattle. The Tugela, which was so near, was still too far for most, and only a few troops enjoyed the privilege of drinking and washing in its sweet, full-running abundance. Of the sloppiness of a London wet day many know something, but of the dreary, dirty muddiness of big camps in prolonged wet weather happily they know but little. No scrapers, no doormats are in evidence; you bring into the tents enough of the soil of the country to supply a garden with mould. The soldier's tent becomes a sort of backyard, sleeping-room, dining-room, bath-room, drying-room all rolled into one upon the same floor. Extra

rations and an occasional tot of rum were the comforts by day.

There are people who are never contented, not even with the three days wherein every soldier was allowed 1¾ lb. of fresh meat. An acquaintance of mine, an officer in the Army Service Corps, was unfortunately called from his urgent duties by a brother officer, who desired to consult him upon a matter of pressing moment. Said the intruder, "Out of one of my companies of 100 men there are nineteen vegetarians. Now what do you recommend I should give them in lieu of the extra beef ration?" "There are no substitutes I can issue," replied the Army Service man. "Then what am I to do with these men?" demanded the officer. "Well," answered the other, "I suggest that, as the next best thing to be done, you turn them out to graze!" Whether he did nobody knows, or whether they are consuming the living, wild, succulent plants of Natal no one cares; but from the haggard aspect of the martyrs, I imagine they have backslided upon bully beef and coarse biscuits.

The Royal Engineers suffered much loss upon Spion Kop. Lieutenant Falcon, of the 17th Company, had three bullets pass through his helmet, a shell wounded him in the arm and leg, breaking the bone below the knee, and two Mauser bullets passed through his thighs. Major Massey, commanding the same company, who did his duty in

face of a terrible hail of bullets and shell, was literally shot to death. The Colonial Imperial Light Infantry went into action upon Spion Kop at 9 a.m., and remained upon the mountain till 8 p.m. Out of 850 men they had thirty-nine killed and ninety wounded, including amongst the latter a brother of your correspondent, Mr. Falconer, who was struck with a piece of shell. Most of these Volunteers were Outlanders, and at least six of them, whose bodies were afterwards discovered, had been clubbed to death by the Boers. Two of those slaughtered in that way, Corporal Weldon and Private Daddon, were ex-Pretoria men. Lieutenant Rudall, of the L.L.I., whilst leading the reliefs towards the right about 11 a.m., was hit and killed by a "pom-pom" shell.

Here is the strangest story of all from Spion Kop, and one which I have had verified from several quarters. During a lull, when the Boers were making their counter-attacks upon the Lancashire battalions, an officer in khâki suddenly appeared at the corner of the trench, and, in good English, bade the men come out and not stay there, as they were of no use in that position. "Come this way!" he cried, and several men got out to follow him. A few steps forward, around the rocks, they saw a number of Boers, and the soldiers hesitated. "They are friends," cried the officer; "come on!" But a Lancashire lad replied, "Hold on a bit. Who are you?" The officer, who proved to be, it

is said, an Austrian, grabbed the man's rifle, but the soldiers quietly gave him the bayonet, stretching the fellow upon the ground just as the Boers from the rocks fired a volley into our men. Only two or three of the soldiers were able to regain unwounded the cover of the trench, which, unfortunately, was not dug in the most commanding spot. More than once that day the cry "Retire!" was raised upon Spion Kop by Boers anxious to get our men away.

You can rely upon it that no one more than General Buller deplores the mistake which led to the foolish evacuation of that key of the Boer position. That little cherub Middy Downs has again been distinguishing himself at Chieveley. For so youthful a salt he is full of pluck, and has an inexhaustible store of humour. His criticisms are a matter of camp notoriety. With the bluejackets, after a heavy storm—or rather during it,—he was sent out to recover some ammunition from near the naval 12-pounder gun-pit. The place was afloat, and Downs, scrambling for the ammunition, tumbled in, and was nearly drowned. Luckily some loose railway sleepers were about, and upon one of these he swam out. Regaining his legs and solid land, he said, "Ah! this is a gun-pit, is it? I suppose it is a bally army gun-pit."

The cavalry reconnaissance to Honger's Poort on January 30 found few Boers, and the chief result was a day's outing for the troopers. On

Wednesday, January 31, the artillery of General Buller's force was materially strengthened by a battery of horse artillery. There was a redistribution and changing of camps on Thursday, February 1. Major-General Talbot-Coke moved his brigade forward under the slopes of Mount Alice, where he was upon favourable ground from which to render help in case of an attack on the camp. During that and the following day, preparations were made for placing guns upon Swartz Kop proper. This is a very rugged, steep, double-topped, wood-covered mountain rising from the flat meadow-land down by the winding Tugela. In appearance it is not unlike Dumbarton, on the Clyde. Owing to its position upon the flank of Brakfontein it almost commands the enemy's works, but in turn it is overlooked by the far higher Doornkloof ranges. With great labour the naval 12-pounders and other guns were got up Swartz Kop, the sailors managing with steel hawsers to warp their cannon up very smartly. A mountain battery of screw-guns that took the same road had a hard time. Several of the mules fell, and one rolled down the mountain with part of the gun and was killed. The piece was recovered and sent up on another mule to the top. After the guns, including even bigger cannon, gained the summit a roadway was blasted and made up the hillside.

On Saturday, February 3, sports were held at the South African Light Horse camp, in which

Captain Bimbashi Steward's "A" Squadron was well to the front in the tug-of-war, wrestling, and other events. The customary camp-fire and sing-song followed in the evening, and as the news had leaked out that a forward movement was on, the men were in the highest spirits. Colonel Byng distributed the prizes to the successful competitors.

To-day and yesterday there has been much receiving and sending of messages by helios and lamps to and from Signal Hill or Mount Alice and Ladysmith. Numbers of the despatches have been in cypher, but hundreds have passed of an entirely private character. The two helios can be very plainly seen at Ladysmith. One twinkles busily from the end of Waggon Hill, near one of Besters' Farms, and was the first we got into communication with, while the other glints and winks from Thornhill's Farm. Above the Orange Free State railway junction, a mile behind Ladysmith and upon the north-east, at night-time the Boers, by means of their new powerful acetylene lamps, try to spoil our signallers' messages, but I am glad to say they have not frustrated the nightly interchange between us and the town. According to messages to hand from Ladysmith, I hear that the garrison is living comfortably enough upon a reduced ration scale. Whisky is no longer practically procurable. As much as £20 a bottle is offered and finds no takers. Cigars, cigarettes, and tobacco are also at famine

prices ; in truth, cigarettes and cigars are not procurable, and tobacco sells at £4 a pound. The Army surgeons, however, have managed to retain certain stores and luxuries for the exclusive use of the sick and wounded.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE FAILURE OF VAAL KRANTZ

Chieveley, February 9, 1900

Long ere this reaches you the country will have learned the disappointing news of General Buller's third failure to pierce the Boer lines and relieve Ladysmith. The feeling of chagrin that must have penetrated all loyal British hearts far and wide never, I think, can have attained the poignancy, the mortification, felt by all ranks here. Officers and men declared that they were humiliated and disgraced. Yet, surely all this was the exaggeration of disappointment, for the troops have not yet sustained any actual defeat at the hands of the Boers, nor have the enemy ever shown the least tendency to press us when it has been decided to retire the soldiers out of action. Waiting and hiding in strong, natural positions, which they have toilsomely and elaborately fortified, they have been content to score the negative success of maintaining their ground. But of ourselves. There was a moroseness abroad rarely manifested by the Queen's

troops. That General Buller, upon whom rested all the weight of the responsibility for the third failure, felt keenly chagrined at the defeat of his plans, even his iron courage and will failed to hide. He had brought his troops into a position where he had doubted not but that they would possess him and themselves of the key to Ladysmith. The planned stroke had not miscarried, the hill was captured; but, alas! the wished-for key did not fit the Boer lock.

To occupy a detached foothill called Vaal Krantz, and win past between the lofty Spion Kop and Doorn Kloof ranges, had been his object. Spion Kop rises over 1900 feet above the Tugela; Doorn Kloof is higher by several hundred feet. Less than twenty-four hours' fighting and close examination of the ground convinced him that the road he had chosen to try by was impracticable—nay, all but impossible—whilst the enemy held the high mountain fastnesses upon either side of the gateway. The situation became intensified for the worse when the Boers showed that they had mounted heavy cannon to right and left of our position. Upon the north-east slopes of Spion Kop were two 3½-inch Krupp guns, and upon Doorn Kloof first one and then a second 6-inch Creusot cannon. These latter weapons, outranged as well as outclassed, in metal, all our array of artillery. The 4.7 naval guns, worn out as they were, did good service; but the enemy, firing from a higher plateau, had the range of them

for a considerable distance. Happily the Boer shells, though big, are not remarkably deadly when they explode.

Although General Buller very early foresaw the real situation of affairs, he struggled on for a time, hoping, no doubt, that the chances of war might disclose some unexpected advantage to our arms. But the position did not improve, nor did the multitude of war councils and counsellors help to mend matters. Retirement, he felt sure, was the only solution of the difficulty, as it was one that no fighting could overcome. There were suggestions, applications—nay, almost protests, more or less audible—that he should, at least, let the Army fight one general action before deciding to retire the men. Thrice had the troops carried hills at some cost, and thrice had they been withdrawn from them, held back from pushing forward and engaging in a battle royal. It was pointed out that his army had not yet fought a general action, only a brigade more or less being permitted to engage at a time. The hot-blooded wished to essay the ordeal of trial by bullet and steel before abandoning the attempt from Potgieter's to open the Ladysmith road to British arms. "What mattered a loss of 5000 men or so," they urged, "for were not 8000, or more, awaiting relief in Ladysmith?" "Yes," it was answered, "if the enterprise succeeded; but, again, it was better to try, and even fail, than make no attempt of any kind."

To which response was, "Yes; best to try, but in the best available direction; but wrong to do so where the attempt to break through was almost foredoomed to defeat."

These are the free, but, I think, accurate condensations of what took place. All sorts of daring proposals were made to Sir Redvers Buller to carry the heights and capture the enemy's big guns, only to be rejected. Then spleen found vent in expressions of discontent, mistrust, and what-not, that "General Debility" or "General Paralysis" had command of the army in Natal. In spite of all, General Buller stuck to his own view, which was probably based upon information far outside the ken of the majority of his critics. Let me not be misunderstood. I am neither defending nor accusing the line adopted by Sir Redvers. Probably he was right. At any rate, he was likely to come to a decision based upon facts in his possession, which is more than can be honestly said for the majority of his severe critics. Most probably not 5000, but 10,000 men might have been led only to slaughter or imprisonment had the impetuously irresponsible had their wish. And I am not without hearty sympathy for many who would have dared and risked all upon a single issue, when the apparent advantages lay with the enemy. The General, whose own temperament would, I am sure, have preferred to fit in with such an enterprise, had the sober resolution

to hold fast to his conviction, that the guidance of the British troops, through checks, disappointments, hardships, to sure victory, was above all his highest duty. Hard as it may seem to say so, I am not disinclined to believe that General Buller, in falling back for the third time, has adopted the wisest course under the circumstances. To refuse to pursue a faulty plan further, to decide to withdraw, and try all over again at some other point, requires a great degree of hardihood and courage, even in the commander of an army. I fancy most people would have persisted in following their blunder through to the bitter end.

Many of the failures of the campaign, I must declare, are attributable solely to our own neglect to employ some portion or other of the almost limitless material means the Empire possesses. Neither our generals nor commanding officers, as a rule, have as yet accurately gauged the enemy. Take, for instance, the simple question of cannon. Of these the Fleet have abundant store, to be had almost for the asking by our generals. Captain Scott, R.N., and others, offered to mount even 6-inch guns upon trucks and despatch them towards Colenso. Under a fire of two or more 6-inch cannon, with their 100-pound lyddite shells, and ten, or even twenty, 4.7 naval guns, not a position that the Boers occupy but could have been made absolutely untenable. These for long range; and to deal with sharp-shooters another, but a 6-inch, battery of howitzers

would have settled the business. To stay beneath the fire of such batteries would have been like dwelling in Pompeii in the days of the great destruction.

We all knew on Sunday, February 4, that next day General Buller intended attacking the line of low hills opposite Potgieter's Drift. Brakfontein is the principal feature of the chain that, running nearly east and west, connects the Spion Kop mountain ridges with Doorn Kloof. The latter, in turn, is but the western spurs of the Grobler's Kloof heights opposite Colenso. From Potgieter's and the other drifts in the convoluted W and adjacent bends of the Tugela, the roadways pass over either Brakfontein or some other part of the six to eight miles long low chain of ridges. As a barrier they interposed between the Army and Ladysmith. Brakfontein was fortified and loomed as threateningly upon us as Fort Queln does over Metz. But far more seriously menacing were the eerie-like fastnesses of Spion Kop and Doorn Kloof, guarding on either hand the portal and lesser ranges. Modern cannon could send shells from summit to base of either mountain, thus more effectually barring the drifts and roadways.

Neither by wire nor letter were we permitted to give details of what was to take place on Monday. There was to be a feint or demonstration from our left against Brakfontein, and a determined attack later in the day upon the right, to carry the separated

crested hill of Vaal Krantz. From Signal Hill and Swartz Kop General Buller and staff had looked upon Vaal Krantz. They had come to the conclusion that it was possible to seize the hill, for the Boers had not strongly fortified the spot. From Vaal Krantz, Krantz Kloof and other positions were to be occupied, and, under the cover which the interlocking ridges gave, the Army was to be hurried across the Tugela upon pontoon bridges to threaten Brakfontein and other salient points from flank and rear. It all looked very feasible from Swartz Kop; but in this corner of Natal every hill seems to be commanded by another behind or to right or left of the one you desire to occupy. And so General Buller found out later. Recollect, hasty carpers, that scouting is no easy thing in Natal, more particularly before an enemy whose rifle-practice at 1500 yards is not to be despised. The fine sighting of the Mauser rifle, and the high velocity of its bullet, make it a far surer shooting weapon than the rough Lee-Metford. But it is no use putting a fine weapon in Tommy's hands.

Very quietly our preparations were completed. Guns were with infinite labour placed upon Swartz Kop, and Warren's division, with other troops, moved down towards the intended field of action. Swartz Kop, viewed from Mount Alice or Signal Hill, seems a relatively small double-topped mountain rising out of the plain to the east of Potgieter's Drift. The eastern is

much the larger of the two hump-backed, rough-wooded, rocky eminences. Both, despite their rugged sides, are relatively smooth and flat on top. Guns were placed upon either. Upon the eastern summit were put the 7-pounder mountain battery, two 15-pounders field artillery, and six naval 12-pounders. Yet there was ample space for more upon the mountain's flat roof, which extended to one and three-quarters of a mile, and was proportionately broad. The ever-wonderful mules somehow, notwithstanding many falls, got the mountain battery up, although the place was as steep in parts as the side of a house. The sailors, helped by the Scottish Rifles, with steel hawsers warped their guns up over the worst parts. It was altogether as astounding a performance as heaving batteries to the masthead of a ship. As for the ammunition, the soldiers carried it by hand, each man bearing a shell or powder-charge. Except by using one's hands, there were parts of the hill it was impossible otherwise to surmount. I saw six mules toiling up on a later day with water-beakers for the men. The leading one, when nearing the top, missed his footing, rolled over and over, cannoning against the others. Down with fearful clatter of falling rocks, scrambling hoofs, and affrighted snortings went the six mules some 200 feet. Killed to the last "kicker"? Not a bit of it! Only their harness knocked about. Muleys all right, shook themselves, and went at it again.

As has been too often the case, we set to work making and repairing roads when they were ceasing to be of further use to the troops or transport in the particular vicinity.

There was a morning mist, or heat haze, which delayed the commencement of operations on Monday, February 5, before Potgieter's. The cavalry was divided into two brigades : the Regulars being placed under Colonel Burn-Murdoch, of the Royals, who took them to the right, near the base of Swartz Kop ; Colonel Lord Dundonald had the Colonials, and was closer to Potgieter's. Sir Charles Warren, who was left with one brigade, occupied the lower plateau west of Mount Alice, overlooking the road winding down to Potgieter's Drift. At 6 a.m. the cavalry went forward, but it was an hour later ere our naval guns from Mount Alice began the battle. They directed their fire against the Boer works upon Spion Kop, Brakfontein, and the positions fronting Potgieter's. The dongas, trenches, and redoubts were conscientiously shelled. But the action proceeded very slowly, the enemy remaining, as is his custom, remarkably quiet—lying, as the troops call it, "doggo," waiting a chance for a snap-bite at us. So thoroughly well made are many of their trenches, having direct communication with dongas, that the Boers can ride upon horseback into or out of their works. Their tracks are, indeed, practically covered ways, for the Boer uses corrugated sheet-iron to roof over part of his trenching.

Colonel (now Major-General) Wynne has succeeded to the command of the Lancashire Brigade since General Woodgate was wounded. About 9 a.m. he led his men forward from behind the five low, detached hills, or hillocks, a mile north of Potgieter's Drift. These we have held almost since the first movement made in this direction. Brakfontein, and the other parts of the larger chain are two miles farther north. Wynne made as though to turn the east corner of Brakfontein. The new balloon was sent up to spy out what the Boers were about, and more particularly where their cannon were placed. Balloons, like good maps, are scarce military commodities in Natal. There are sixteen of them said to be shut up in Ladysmith, with no means of using them, the gas-cylinders being emptied. The former balloon employed here was hulled with shell, Maxim, cannon, and Mausers, and finished up its career by being ingloriously torn against rocks during a storm. Another balloon was obtained, and is being worked by two Sappers and a crew of bluejackets. The wire rope, and much other gear, had to be picked up and bought in Natal. Doing things piecemeal is a tiresomely miserable feature of our War Department service. As for that matter of maps, the best one of Natal was produced by the German military attaché from his pocket, whither it has been returned.

As the Lancashire Brigade went forward in widely-spread and far-apart successive lines of

skirmishers, five field batteries and the 50-pounder howitzers thundered lyddite and shrapnel upon the enemy's trenches and works. The balloonist directed by telephone where the Boers clustered thickest behind their defences. Well to the front of the infantry, in the earlier stages, kept the sailors and aeronaut—the latter an R.E. officer. Brakfontein and the adjacent ridges were reverberating with din of exploding missiles, and columns of rock and dust were flying into the air from the detonating lyddite bombs. The ridges were smoking and afire. It had been arranged that the batteries upon Spion Kop were to remain masked until later in the day, when the serious attack was to be delivered against Vaal Krantz. But the disclosure by the Boers of the possession of Maxim cannon and a big gun upon Spion Kop led them, at 8.30 a.m., to join in the bombardment. The infantry went steadily, slowly forward, as if to charge the Boer works. By 9 a.m. they were near enough for the enemy to begin sniping in earnest at ranges of 1200 yards or less. Their marksmanship was indifferent, and the troops, disregarding their tormentors, walked or ran forward. At convenient stages they would lie down flat upon the ground and open independent and volley firing at the enemy concealed in dongas and trenches.

Meanwhile the Royal Engineers were busily laying down a trestle-work and pontoon bridge combined near Munger's Drift, which is up-stream

from Schiet Drift. Munger's has the reputation of being an unsafe and treacherous ford. The Boers awoke a little too late to the danger of our bridging at Munger's. When they discovered what was going on at the drift, they opened a sharp fusillade upon the sappers and the covering party of soldiers. To General Lyttelton had been entrusted the task of rushing Vaal Krantz. The Boer cannon—pom-poms, and 40-pounders—came to the assistance of their burgher marksmen, and poured a rapid, incessant fire towards Munger's crossing. Their aim was indifferent, and so, luckily, only five sappers and a few soldiers were wounded. Whilst the cannon and rifles were flashing fire and hurtling death, there were two helios at Ladysmith glittering and sending us messages to Signal Hill. By means of these simple apparatus and our corresponding stations, Generals Buller and White were enabled to communicate smartly and fully with one another.

The bridge having been completed, there was no further need for continuing the demonstration between Brakfontein. Under a redoubled fire from Boer guns and Mausers, General Wynne proceeded to withdraw his brigade. To the casual observer it was, probably, as if the Lancashire lads had been driven in, although they were retiring very deliberately and in perfect order. I could see no indications of undue hastening in any direction. At slow march the brigade came back towards the detached kopjes from which they had set out. The whole

range of batteries, except the Royal Horse Artillery, which was not brought into the firing-line, effectually dominated the Boer Mausers, at any rate. Brakfontein and its nearest neighbours were spurting dust, flame, and rocks like an active volcano. The 5-inch siege-guns made incomparably good practice. As for the howitzers and 4.7-inch naval guns, they also were doing great execution. Substantially the demonstration on the west before Brakfontein was over by 10 a.m. But the artillery still kept out in the open, within a little over 2000 yards of the hill chain, pounding the Boer lines without stint.

Towards high noon the storm of artillery, roar and shock of cannon, and shriek of shells in mid-air was almost deafening and bewildering. The great missiles tore overhead with the uproar of a locomotive hammering through a tunnel at express speed. When the din became furious, musketry joining in the uproar, it was as the tear and whirl of hundreds of huge machinery wheels broken loose, or many engines racing. Never was stouter, more indomitable courage displayed than by the howitzer and field batteries. A hurricane of Boer common and shrapnel shell descended upon them. Shells burst to right, left, front, and behind them, but found them unmoved. Nay, the missiles struck under the limbers, almost under the gunners' feet, and out of the bursting, splashing, smoke, and dust-encircling clouds, steadily the gunners laid their pieces, pulled the lanyards, flash of exploding shell answering

upon the instant with darting flame from British cannon. To and fro the gunners walked, doing their duty without fluster or haste, and showing by their shooting that their aim was good and true. Horses were wounded and one or two were killed. A few gunners also fell, and were carried in, and for nearly an hour the contest rose and fell from the enemy's lines, but from ours the fire continued with unabated force and steadiness.

Orders were sent to the batteries to go on with the original instructions and move to the right, so as to more nearly and directly shell Vaal Krantz. About half-past noon preparations were made for withdrawing three batteries. Forward trotted the teams with the limbers for one battery, the unflinching gunners meanwhile loading and firing to the last moment. When all was in readiness the guns moved off in perfect alignment, the six upon one axle, as if upon show parade. And yet it was deadly war, for the Boer shells were falling and tearing the ground upon all sides. So battery by battery, the last in sections, was retired and sent off to take up new positions facing Vaal Krantz, nearly two miles to the east. Let it be remembered that our artillery were fighting in the open, upon low ground overlooked by the Boer works and trenches. The last three to be withdrawn were ammunition waggons. All the wounded and left material were placed very deliberately upon the two which had teams. For over five minutes they waited, putting

things to rights and re-arranging harness, under a rainstorm of shells. Then they walked off the field, followed by shells step by step. The last waggon, belonging to the 78th Battery Royal Artillery, had no horses. They had been wounded, and one or two of them killed. Thereupon the artillerymen took charge, and, whilst one handled the bar, or tongue, the other four bent themselves upon the wheels, trundling the lumbering vehicle back from the field. Under a scathing fire they rolled the waggon nearly 200 yards, when comrades, noting the state of affairs, ran out under fire and helped them to bring in the vehicle safe and sound. How all, or any, escaped seemed little less than miraculous. The balloon, which also had to shift, had its visitation. From its lofty altitude it was wound down to the ground, only to be made the steady target for Boer guns and rifles. The wire hawser, bought in Durban, which only weighs four pounds for every 100 feet of length, and sustains a breaking strain of 1600 pounds, was disconnected. Then the six sailors and two sappers, with bullets and shells dropping at their feet, marched away after the batteries with the bobbing, big, translucent sphere. For sailors they walked remarkably well, holding on whilst the smoke and dust raised by the Boer shells almost blinded them.

Shortly after 1 p.m. our batteries were at it again, slating the Boers upon and around the hills near Vaal Krantz. A number of the enemy had

got into the dongas under Doorn Kloof—or, rather, one of its detached foothills. The men of Hildyard's Brigade and the batteries paid particular attention to these gentry, and succeeded in greatly quieting them. Sniping also went on from across the Tugela against the east slopes of Swartz Kop, but the Colonial cavalry kept the Boers there in check very speedily in that direction. The atmosphere grew clearer as the afternoon advanced. At 3 p.m., from near Munger's Farm, General Lyttelton launched his brigade at Vaal Krantz. The farm buildings across Munger's Drift, under Doorn Kloof, were stoutly held. With the Durham Light Infantry leading, and the 3rd Battalion King's Royal Rifles upon their right, up rose from the sloping banks of the Tugela the troops, and dashed forward towards the rugged sides of Vaal Krantz. From front and flanks the enemy opened fire. Apparently our shell-fire had shaken the enemy's nerves upon Vaal Krantz. Scarcely 200 remained to defend the position, and of these half bolted when the Durhams, with a cheer, ran in with the bayonet and caught them in their trenches.

There was angry, hurried work with steel, and peppering of fleeing Boers; but the affair was over in a minute. Some ten Boers cried for mercy, holding up their hands, and were made prisoners. With the perverseness of that kind of creature, now they are safe, several have since declared their unconquerable resolution to

fight again when they get a chance. One of these is an Austrian named Moeller, and a so-called Englishman named Knight, who gives a Capetown address. Amongst the other prisoners is a gentlemanly Hollander named Bok, son of the ex-State-Attorney of the Transvaal, and an Irishman named Tully, an old burgher. In the trenches were found a number of dead Kaffirs, who had been fighting side by side with the Boers. Our prisoners tell us that many thousands of natives have been forced to fight against us by the enemy besides the Kaffirs, who follow their masters into battle. An injured Kaffir fired at and wounded an officer in the hand after the latter had striven to save the man's life. From prisoners we have had further confirmation of the fact that the enemy make use of the Red Cross ambulance waggons, flying the Geneva flags, to convey ammunition for cannon and small-arms during battle. Of that I have, on more than one occasion, seen evidence during the last four days. Nay, I strongly suspect that they have not hesitated to carry the Maxim cannon (pom-pom) from part to part of the field under the protection of the Red Cross flag.

There was a statement that gained credence that Buller meant, when the light brigade seized Vaal Krantz, to send forward all his cavalry and pierce the Boer lines, turning back upon the reverse slopes of Brakfontein. For that purpose, Colonel Burn-Murdoch lay waiting with the Royals, the 13th

and 14th Hussars, and the chestnut R.H.A. Battery, on the north-east side of Swartz Kop, and Dundonald with the Colonials nearer Potgieter's. But the dash, for some unknown reason, was never executed. Probably the disclosure of the strength of the Boer artillery led to an estopper being put upon that part of the planned operations. As quickly as possible General Lyttelton secured cover for his men upon the eastern crest of Vaal Krantz. The ridge was found to be somewhat razor-backed, angular, and unsatisfactory. From behind, a further hill made it rather insecure, whilst, as the Boers held ground to west and east, as well as north, Lyttelton's men were treated to a heavy fire from Mausers, backed by the pom-pom and cannon from Spion Kop. The grass upon the slopes had been set alight by the shell-fire, and volumes of blinding smoke interfered with the shooting. A fairly determined effort was made by the enemy towards the close of the day to drive us from the Vaal Krantz; but, reinforced by the Scottish Rifles and the 3rd Battalion King's Royal Rifles, the men, without much difficulty, repulsed the assailing Boers and held their ground.

Hildyard had moved up to render assistance, but Lyttelton, with two battalions, was able to deal with every effort used by the Boers. He kept the most of his men well under cover, lying along the base of Vaal Krantz. His brigade had been strengthened by the Devons, who remained near the pontoon

bridge. One of the unpleasant discoveries made was that it would be very difficult to get guns upon Vaal Krantz. The batteries, therefore, that were to have gone forward at once to that advanced position, were held back whilst the pontoon bridge was strengthened and widened, in the hope that later on they could be sent across. There was hot firing until 7 p.m., when a slight rain began falling, helping to damp out the widespread grass-fires running along the Boer line of hills. The troops, who had nearly all descended from Spearman's with most of the baggage-train into the low ground, prepared to bivouac. General Buller and his Staff, who had remained throughout the day below Swartz Kop, directly opposite Vaal Krantz and Munger's Drift, decided to remain upon the field with the men.

We had learned that 4000 Boers occupied the Doorn Kloof, and that the rest of the Transvaal Army, under Joubert, were gathered, or gathering, along our front. In one commando of 1000 men it was said there were no fewer than ten languages needed to converse with the men. Delay was to be alone feared, for it would afford them time to dig into new positions, and bring up big guns from Colenso and Ladysmith. Perhaps we have not always made the most of the little mobility we possess, and the transport has been the millstone round our leaders' necks. Let me emphasize that our transport has never failed us yet, but has been always enterprising and up to time, and the army

has never lacked for superabundance of supplies or ammunition. But it is in the nature of things in modern warfare for it to be unwieldy and needing space, and more men to guard. Monday, on the whole, closed auspiciously. The Boers had been driven from Vaal Krantz, the key of their advanced position facing the drifts. It but remained for us to try to pour through and turn their works to right and left, or march on to Ladysmith. But how about our baggage and supply-train? Something more had to be done, for it could never be safely brought on with us whilst the Boers were able to shell the drifts and pontoons.

The Boers cunningly set fire to the grass near General Lyttelton's position, and by means of the light it gave shelled the brigade during the night, bringing up the Maxim cannon. But still we held our own, and more, having forced the enemy further from the hill. Before sunrise the enemy startled the camps by firing from Doorn Kloof their 100-, or, to be accurate, 96-pounder Creusot gun. Their shells burst in every direction, several falling at no great distance from General Buller's head-quarters. They make much noise, but, fortunately, do very little injury—none whatever commensurate with their sound and fury. Under the fire of two or three pom-poms, the 30- and 40-pounders from Spion Kop, and the Creusot, the enemy tried several times to regain the lost position. Our big guns and naval 12-pounders bent all their energies

to knocking out the Boer 100-pounder, but without complete success. We blew up ammunition waggons and what-not, but the gun itself was so well covered that it apparently could not be reached. When our bursting lyddite ceased to make havoc around their battery and pit, out again the long black muzzle of the Boer gun would be run and recommence firing. Evidently it was mounted in such a way that it could run upon an inclined pair of rails. Very smartly and pluckily the enemy worked the weapon for all it was worth, but little harm they did us, thank goodness! Our naval guns were more successful in dismantling and knocking out one of the 3½-inch Krupps mounted upon Spion Kop. During the course of Tuesday afternoon General Buller had given up hope of penetrating the Boer lines. I learned as much from his own lips. He was deeply chagrined that the matter had turned out so, and thought it unwise to assume graver risks. Ladysmith had been a notoriously unsafe place, and troops ought not to have been allowed to remain in that town.

Firing went on steadily throughout Tuesday. Our field-batteries and howitzers continued doing their allotted duty, pounding the Boer trenches and the dongas in front, and they paid no heed to either Long Toms or the Krupp shells, both of which dropped occasionally and indiscriminately beside the batteries. That evening, at sunset, Hildyard's brigade relieved Lyttelton's upon Vaal Krantz.

"Never," said an officer to me, "have I grovelled so long and wearily in the dust as I did during our thirty-six hours' watch upon Vaal Krantz." Hildyard had to repulse a very severe night-attack of the enemy, which his brigade—the Queen's East Surrey and West Yorks—did in gallant style. Wednesday was much as Thursday, fighting all day, but we were making little or no progress upon or along Vaal Krantz. The cavalry and some of the stores were ordered behind Swartz Kop for shelter. That afternoon there was a council of war upon the field, at which all the generals were present except Clery, who has met with an accident to his leg, which confines him temporarily to bed. All advocated retirement, as the lines could not be forced, except Major-General Hart, who was for storming Doorn Kop. The brave Dublin Fusiliers volunteered to capture or destroy the one or two Boer Long Toms upon Doorn Kop, and General Hart, whom his brigade called General No-Bobs—for he never ducks for a shell—wanted to lead them.

At 6 p.m., Wednesday, orders were issued for the retirement of the supply column, which had unfortunately, and somewhat recklessly, been sent down the one steep road to the low ground. That evening the Boers were shelling the column, and the hospital, which was much too far within their cannon-fire area. Throughout Wednesday night and Thursday the retirement of the whole army continued, the Boers shelling the waggons and

troops in all directions—as usual doing, I assure you, very little hurt. Our naval guns remained upon Signal Hill, replying whilst the pontoons were taken up. The guns removed from Swartz Kop, and all our baggage and stores, were hauled back upon the upper plateau. To-day (Friday) the last of the stores and troops have been withdrawn from Spearman's, and are encamped around Springfield, on their way hither. What next? Well, within three days General Buller means to make an attack, with not a brigade, but his whole army, over the old Colenso ground, which I have all along maintained should never have been left, as it is upon our best line of communications—the railway. Before Monday you will have startling news, I hope, and hear that Ladysmith has been this time in reality relieved. I am sorry to say that they are on very short rations there, and have been reduced to eating horseflesh for some weeks. But they mean, with or without our help, to attempt to break out. God bless and help them!

EPILOGUE

General Buller's attempts to relieve Ladysmith were four in number: of which three, for various reasons, were failures, and the fourth successful. The first was the frontal attack at Colenso, spoilt by the unfortunate loss of our guns under Colonel Long, which got within range not only of the Boer trenches, but of the cannon in Fort Wylie. The second was the attack on Spion Kop; the third the advance to and seizure of Vaal Krantz. The fourth began on February 17 with an assault on Monte Cristo and the Cingola positions; and the following day both were captured, and the enemy were driven across the Tugela. The strong Boer position on Hlangwane Hill on the extreme east was taken, and Colenso itself occupied by February 20. On February 21 the Fifth Division crossed the river, and for the next two days there was heavy fighting round Pieter's Station, when two or three counter-attacks were repelled. The first effort to occupy Pieter's Hill, which was the key of the Boer

position, was tried and failed on February 24, the Inniskillings suffering severe losses in the engagement. Then General Buller returned to the south side of the Tugela and relaid his pontoon bridge at another point. The new movement was crowned with success. On Tuesday, February 27, Pieter's Hill was stormed and the enemy's main position afterwards carried; while on the next day, February 28, Lord Dundonald with his cavalry entered Ladysmith, which was thus relieved on the one hundred and nineteenth day of a heroic and memorable siege.

APPENDIX

THE BOER ASSAULT ON LADYSMITH

By P. C. McHUGH

Ladysmith, January 7, 1900

For the second time the Boers have made an attack on Ladysmith, and for the second time they have failed, with disastrous results. Their first attempt was made as far back as November 9. The lesson they then got lasted them nearly two whole months. Yesterday, in the dim hours before early dawn, they again essayed the task of capturing a portion, at least, of our defences, and they were repulsed with a loss which is estimated by the Headquarters Staff at 1100 men, killed and wounded. The assault was made with desperate energy and determination, and the action, which was almost hand-to-hand, lasted from before three in the morning until six in the evening, or fifteen hours of hard fighting. In my telegrams I have already described the main features

of the battle, and before entering into a more detailed account here, it will not, perhaps, be amiss to give some account of the events which led to it, and also a brief description of the scene of the action.

After the repulse of the attack of November 9, the Boers confined their siege operations entirely to long-range firing with heavy guns. No attempt was made to push their works closer to the town, or to bring their artillery nearer our lines. For a time the bombardment was conducted with considerable energy from some twenty-five or thirty guns, the evident object being to compel the garrison to surrender. Finding that their fire did not have the desired effect, the artillerists relaxed their efforts, and a desultory pounding from the guns on Bulwana, Gun Hill, and Telegraph Ridge was all we had to endure. After the capture of the guns on Gun Hill and Surprise Hill, the bombardment, except for occasional spurts, became even more desultory, and we had reliable information that consultations as to whether the siege of Ladysmith should not be raised, were held between the Transvaal and Free State commanders and field-cornets. The Free State Boers, it is said, strongly urged that the siege should be pushed with vigour or else abandoned entirely, while the Transvaal Boers, many of whom witnessed our evacuation of Dundee before the fire of their 6-inch Creusot guns, still had faith in these weapons

to compel surrender. From the time of these conferences onwards there were frequent disputes between the Free State and the Transvaal Boers on the question of the siege, and finally the former accused their comrades of being afraid to attack Ladysmith. The Heidelberg (Transvaal) Commando openly took the same side.

Matters were approaching a serious stage when General Joubert hastily returned from Colenso, where his army is confronting Sir Redvers Buller, and a grand conference was held on the 5th inst., at which, after much recrimination between the two parties, Commandant de Villiers, of the Harrismith (Free State) Commando, said the Free Staters were as good as their word, and he would lead his men against Ladysmith. The Commandant of the Heidelberg Commando, who had all along sided with the Free State in the dispute, pledged his followers to the attack also. So it was arranged that the attack should be made in the early hours of the following morning. Reinforcements, estimated at 7000 men, were hurried up from Colenso, and every Boer that could be spared from the northern and eastern surroundings of Ladysmith was brought round to the south-west. We now know, as we have known all through the siege, that the Boers had most intimate and accurate information of all our movements, and it was admitted by some of them to our people on the morning after the battle that, in selecting Saturday

morning, they were influenced by the knowledge that we would that morning, and all through the night, be engaged in mounting a 4·7-inch gun on Waggon Hill, and they hoped that the noise of our working-party would drown the sound of their approach.

Having decided to attack, the Boers, with that unerring eye for country and the unfailing instinct for choosing a military position which they seem to possess, selected the long ridge known to us under the collective names of Maiden Castle, Cæsar's Camp, and Waggon Hill (but which is all included in the local name of Bester's Ridge), as the point where they would make their attempt. It was an admirable choice. The ridge runs nearly north-east and south-west. It is fairly high, and is covered with huge boulders and stones, like all these barren African hills. At the eastern end the mimosa bush that grows on the plain extends right up to the edge of the plateau, and affords admirable cover. The southern and western faces are bare, but the rocks with which they abound offered just the sort of ground that suits the Boer rifleman. From the foot of the hill to the Rooi Kopjes, or Red Hills, about a mile away, where the Boer position begins, is a level, grassy flat, intersected at two or three places by dry watercourses. Late in yesterday's desperate fight these watercourses were fatal spots to the enemy, as I shall explain later on. Waggon Hill marks the western extremity of the ridge, and

Cæsar's Camp its eastern. The troops occupying the position on the night of the 5th inst. were the 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment at Cæsar's Camp, four companies of the 1st King's Royal Rifle Corps on the middle of the ridge, and seventy men of the Imperial Light Horse on Waggon Hill. At the latter point there were also thirty men of the Royal Engineers, and half a dozen sailors of the Naval Brigade, who were engaged in mounting the 4·7-inch gun. But little effort had been made to strengthen the hill with earthworks or shelter-trenches. The Manchesters had erected a few circular stone sangers, and the Rifles had also made some tentative attempt to provide cover; but Waggon Hill and the neck connecting it, with the main ridge, were entirely without shelter save that furnished by the boulders. At the extreme end a sandbag redoubt was made for the gun, but it was not defensively occupied when the attack was made. This failure to carefully fortify their position cost our troops many a brave life. It was so obvious a duty that its neglect almost makes one think that the men were careless of their lives, were not the latter supposition controverted by the action of a few of them during the progress of the fight.

It was at Waggon Hill that the first attack was made. Shortly after midnight the Light Horse pickets heard a hymn being sung in the Boer lines. To men who have spent years in the Transvaal, as every man in the Light Horse has done, this should

have conveyed a warning. The Boers do not sing hymns at midnight without some special reason, and a doubly keen watch should have been kept upon them. Nothing special, however, seems to have been done. One small picket of eight men at the foot of the hill was all that was out, and on top the Sappers and sailors toiled away at their gun. Suddenly in the darkness, about half-past one, the picket saw within a few yards of them a body of men approaching. They challenged, and the answer came in perfect English, "Do not fire, we are members of the Town Guard." This latter is composed of civilians enrolled to patrol the streets of the town during the night, and, if necessary, to take an active part in its defence. The members of it do not wear uniforms, and, when carrying bandoliers and rifles, they almost exactly resemble a party of Boers. The Light Horse picket should not, however, have been so easily deceived, as the Town Guard is never employed outside the limits of Ladysmith. The picket accepted the reply, and the Boers, advancing closer, poured in a volley. Five of the picket were shot down, and the other three taken prisoners.

The volley warned those on the top of the hill, but it was too late. A second party had scaled the western face of the hill unobserved, and the first intimation of their presence was a rush into the gun-position and a volley from their rifles. Several of the Sappers fell dead, and an

attempt of the Light Horse to recapture the position was repulsed with the loss of a number of men. Then, in the darkness of the night, began the hard ding-dong fight that went on for fifteen hours. The Sappers and Light Horse, after the first rush, quickly recovered themselves, and, getting under cover of the rocks, they drove the Boers away from the naval gun, where it was lying on the ground near the emplacement. Lieutenant Digby-Jones, R.E., with a courage and resource that merited boundless praise—had the gallant young officer lived to hear it—rallied a group of men, and, placing himself at their head, charged the emplacement and routed the Boers out from behind the sandbags and drove them down the hill. Meanwhile the Boers, many of whom had come barefoot, so that they made no noise on the rocks, had stolen up the nek and began pouring in a terrible fire on the brave Light Horsemen and Engineers. A few of the former, who were in a sangar on the King's Royal Rifle Corps side of the nek, did something to subdue the Boer fire, but in the darkness and confusion their fire was dangerous to friend as well as foe. So until the dawn brightened in the east the fight went on.

Wherever our men saw a rifle-flash along the edge of the hill they fired at it. The Boers, from the cover of the rocks, replied, and again and again made attempts to rush forward, but our troops shot them down the moment they appeared on the little

plateau on the top of the hill. Requests for reinforcements were sent off, and about daylight some companies of the 1st King's Royal Rifles, three companies of Gordons, under Major Miller-Wallnutt, and a few score of Light Horse, came up. The Gordons and the Rifles lined the inner slope of the hill, while the Light Horse and the Sappers still held the end and a portion of the southern edge. The Boers were on the nek and along a part of the outer slope. This was the position nearly the whole of the livelong day. Men kept close under cover behind the rocks and stones, and where they saw a foeman's head or body, they took a snapshot at it and dodged down again under cover.

Hour after hour passed and neither side gained an inch. Both lost men fast, and nearly every man killed or wounded was shot in the head. In the afternoon poor Lieutenant Digby-Jones was shot dead, while encouraging his little force in the gun emplacement. His death caused the utmost grief to General Hamilton, who was in command during the day, and had expressed his intention of recommending the heroic youth for the Victoria Cross because of the gallant way in which he had recaptured the gun emplacement. Lieutenant Dennis, another officer of the Royal Engineers, was killed while endeavouring to animate the Gordons and King's Royal Rifles to a bayonet charge to clear the nek. He sprang forward and called on the men to follow him, but when he had got twenty or thirty yards

he saw that none had responded, and he turned to run back to cover. As he did so a Boer rose from behind a rock, at ten paces' distance, and shot him dead on the spot. The next instant the Boer himself fell, shot by a Light Horseman in the sangar above. Major Miller-Wallnutt, of the Gordons, was directing the fire of his men with splendid effect, and exposed himself with almost reckless bravery. Again and again did the Boers try to shoot him down, without success. At length a huge Boer, with a long, flowing beard, leaped to his feet, and, with instant aim, shot the Major in the head with an express bullet. The missile was of the ordinary explosive sporting type, and the poor officer's head was almost shattered to pieces. His murderer—there is no other word suitable—was riddled with bullets before he could sink back to his place, and next morning his body was identified as that of Commandant de Villiers, the man who urged the attack at the conference. In death he still clutched his rifle so that it could hardly be taken from his hand. He had fired no fewer than 110 rounds from the spot where he was killed, the empty cartridge-cases were lying in a heap at his side, and he had nearly 800 unexpended rounds in his satchel and bandolier.

The Boers who made the attack at this point were all from the Free State, chiefly from the vicinity of Harrismith, and many of them used sporting and Martini-Henry rifles instead of small-

bore weapons. In some cases the men who fired with sporting rifles used the ordinary explosive express bullet, which inflicts wounds of an appalling character. One man of the Imperial Light Horse had a dreadful experience. In the first rush of the Boers he fell wounded between two rocks at the edge of the hill. A Boer sheltered himself partly behind the rocks and partly behind the body of the wounded man. From this position he shot two men dead and wounded a third. It was an urgent necessity to silence this man's rifle, but to do it without hitting a wounded comrade was not easy. Again and again was the Boer fired at without effect, until at last a lucky shot struck him square on the head, and he dropped dead across the wounded Light Horse trooper. When the latter was recovered, some hours later, it was found that he was hit in eight places: two of the wounds were inflicted by the Boers, but six were caused by the bullets of his own comrades while trying to shoot the Boer. Despite his multitudinous hurts the man is in no danger, and will again become fit for duty.

But rifle-bullets were not the only projectiles our brave fellows had to face. Every gun that the Boers could bring to bear opened fire on the ridge at daylight. There were guns on Middle Hill, on Table Hill, and along the Rooi Kopjes, that threw shells on to the southern slopes of Bester's Ridge, while the Creusot gun on Bulwana swept the

northern slopes and the whole extent of the plateau towards Cæsar's Camp. In all, some thirty guns were in action against us yesterday. About five o'clock the 21st Field Battery was sent out beyond Range Post Hill with an escort of the 5th Dragoon Guards. It rendered excellent service in checking the advance of supports to the Boers, and cleared the enemy's reserves out of the deep donga between Middle Hill and Mounted Infantry Hill. The battery and its escort drew the fire of Middle Hill for a time; but, fortunately, there was soft ground immediately in front, and neither the gunners nor the Dragoons suffered much beyond the loss of a few horses. So the fight went on until midday, each side firing away as hard as the men could load their guns and rifles. There was no movement or action in the battle: it was simply a duel of rifle against rifle, and gun against gun. Before midday exhaustion compelled a slackening of the fire, and the men lay behind the rocks, with only an occasional shot to show they were there, until nearly five o'clock, when a tremendous rainstorm came up, accompanied by thunder and lightning. Under cover of rain the Boers advanced again, but on Waggon Hill they were met by a charge with the bayonet by the Gordons and King's Royal Rifles. They did not wait for the steel, but ran panic-stricken down the rocks, while the bullets rained among them, and brought the fleeing men down by dozens. Our officers and men had not escaped lightly. In

addition to the officers I have named, there was also killed Major Mackworth and three officers of the Imperial Light Horse; and Colonel Edwards, Major Davis, Captain Codrington, Major Doveton, and Lieutenant Campbell, all of the same regiment, were wounded. Of the casualties among the men on Waggon Hill, it will be enough to say that the Light Horse had fifty-three men killed or wounded, the Gordons twenty-three; while of the thirty Engineers who were on the hill seventeen were hit, and the half-dozen sailors had one killed and two wounded of their small number.

Lieutenant Mathias of the Imperial Light Horse, brother of Colonel Mathias, of Dargai fame, performed a highly meritorious service in saving a Hotchkiss gun that was on the nek. The gun was surrounded by Boers, and when they were driven back for a moment by our fire, Lieutenant Mathias dashed forward, dragged the gun into our own position, and then down the reverse slope of the hill. It was a plucky action, and prevented the weapon falling into the hands of the Boers, as in a few moments they had returned to the spot on which it had stood.

But, meanwhile, all day an equally fierce and even more critical battle had been in progress a mile or so away at the other end of the ridge. The Manchesters, and some companies of the King's Royal Rifles, met the earliest attack, and had to yield a little to it, but only so much as enabled

them to take up a better position. Reinforcements consisting of five companies of Gordons, three of the 2nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, and three companies of the Devons—the bravest and best on the field—came up later on ; and when the rainstorm broke, the last effort of the Boers was defeated, and they were driven pell-mell off the ridge into the roaring torrents that filled the now foaming water-courses. I must, however, take the events of the day in their order. The attack on the Cæsar's Camp portion of Bester's Ridge was made by the Heidelberg Commando, which came on about 2000 strong. Owing to the distance it had to traverse, it did not reach the ridge until about three o'clock. Our pickets were being changed at the moment, so that, fortunately, there was double the usual number of men on the spot. Lieutenant Hunt-Grubbe, of the Manchester Regiment, who was in charge, heard a suspicious noise along the edge of the hill, and was surprised to hear voices saying, "Border Mounted Rifles, this way. Come on B.M.R." Wondering what had brought the Natal Volunteers there, and never dreaming for a moment that it was the old Boer trick already played with some success several times during the campaign, the lieutenant ran down a little way to ascertain what was the matter, and found himself among a crowd of at least 200 Boers. He was instantly seized, and his sword and field-glasses taken from him, while his captors jeered at him for his simplicity.

Simultaneously with the capture of the unlucky officer, the Boers opened fire on the pickets, and, dashing on in the uncertain light, rushed the sangers nearest the crest of the ridge, and shot or drove out their occupants before they had time to offer effective resistance. The second line of sangers or stone walls was more obstinately held, and, despite their most determined efforts, the Boers never got a foot further along the ridge. About six o'clock the enemy tried to reinforce their attack by sending a great body of troops up through the bush on the north-eastern slopes of Bester's Ridge. The movement was observed and promptly reported by the Border Mounted Rifles, who had been thrown well forward in this direction. Major Abdy's battery, No. 53, Royal Field Artillery, at once opened a searching fire of shrapnel from a position near the western edge of the mimosa bush. The shells were thrown with splendid effect, and not only stopped the Boer reinforcements but inflicted heavy loss, as we saw by the dead next morning, on those who had already got some way up the slope.

This advance, as well as the main attack on this point, was of a most treacherous character. They took advantage of the neutral hospital camp at Intombi's spruit, and kept their men under cover of the hospital tents until the last moment, thereby masking the fire of our men, who could not open on them lest they should shoot their own sick and wounded in the hospital. In the same way our

battery was kept silent for a time when it could have been doing good work. When the battery did come into action there were eighteen enemy's guns, four of them 6-inch Creusots, firing at Cæsar's Camp. "Puffing Billy," however, turned his fire on Major Abdy's battery immediately the first shot was fired by it. The conduct of the gunners under the fire of this gun—which was throwing shrapnel shell, fortunately with percussion fuse—was simply magnificent. I watched it from the crest of the hill above the battery, and again and again I saw our guns fired right out of the cloud of smoke from the enemy's bursting shell. One gun I noticed in particular. A shell exploded, as I judged, right on the gun, and gunners and all disappeared from view. I gazed, fascinated, through my glasses, expecting to see a dismounted gun and mangled men when the smoke had cleared away. But almost before the first shock of the explosion was over, "flash" went the crimson lance of flame from the muzzle of the gun I had thought wrecked, and the shrapnel, aimed as true as if at a peace practice, went smash into a group of the enemy, killing or wounding fifteen out of seventeen of them. It was a splendid exhibition of the coolness and nerve of our gunners, and was worth risking something to see. But it was not only one instance: again and again did I notice shells bursting not a dozen yards from the battery, and the men went on with their work without even turning their heads to look at

them. Surely it is an act of blind folly, or worse, for the officials in Pall Mall to insist on keeping such men armed with what is admittedly the worst field-gun in Europe, and one that is inferior in every point to the field-guns used by the Boers.

I have described how the Boers treacherously used the hospital camp to cover their advance. Another instance of their peculiar methods must be given. About half-past four a man was observed coming up the hill waving a white flag, and shouting, "Don't fire! I want to surrender! I'm coming in." Fire was slackened for an instant, and then it was seen that the white flag man was only a screen covering the advance of about a hundred Boers who were coming along behind him, hiding as well as they could in the thick mimosa bush. An instant afterwards and the flag-bearer and a goodly proportion of his following were shot down. There were no more renewals of this dastardly trick during the battle.

When the Manchesters had been holding the ridge for nearly three hours, several companies of the Gordons arrived, and advanced along the ridge in splendid style. As they came well forward they learned that the sangars, which they had been led to suppose were held by the Manchesters, were really in possession of the Boers, and Captain Carnegie headed a daring and successful bayonet charge for their recovery. Forward the "Gay Gordons" sprang over the rough, rocky

ground, firing as they went, and losing men at every step. The Boers waited until they were almost within reach before breaking and running away. One Boer alone waited for the steel. He was quite a young man, and knelt coolly taking aim at Colour-Sergeant Price as the latter rushed forward with his bayonet. The sergeant and the Boer fired at the same instant, and each wounded the other. But the Gordon was able to keep his feet till he reached his foe; then once, twice, the steel went home, and he fell unconscious across the prostrate body of Lieutenant Hunt-Grubbe, who had been lying a prisoner and uninjured among the Boers in the sangar. The dead Boer, the wounded sergeant, and the officer lay in one heap, and for the moment the soldiers thought all three of them were dead. Afterwards, when Price was carried away, it was found that he had been hit in thirteen places, but the only really serious wound, however, was that inflicted by the Boer whom he killed.

It is worthy of note that, although there were three bayonet charges on Bester's Ridge yesterday, only one dead Boer was found with a bayonet wound. In no case, save the one, did they even wait for the steel. The Gordons came into the fight under disheartening circumstances. Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, V.C., their commander, while waiting two miles away for the order to advance, was hit by a stray bullet and mortally wounded before he had

even started for the scene of battle. About the same time Lord Ava, when acting as galloper to Brigadier-General Hamilton, was shot through the head, and also sustained a mortal wound, while trying to locate the position of the enemy. While the Manchesters and the Gordons bore the brunt of the fight on the eastern slope of the ridge, the Rifle Brigade and the King's Royal Rifle Corps held the southern edge. After midday they were hard pressed, and six companies of the ever-trusty Devons were rushed up to reinforce them. They arrived in the nick of time. The King's Royal Rifles had been fighting steadily all the morning. Shortly before the rainstorm they had taken up a fresh position, upon which the Boers sought to advance further along the top of the ridge. At this critical stage the Devons arrived, and, fixing bayonets, they charged the advancing Boers, checked their forward movement, and compelled them to retire in utter confusion back over the crest. The gallant Devons suffered heavily, both in officers and men, but they held the ground they had won, and earned the special thanks of Sir George White for their splendid and timely charge, which undoubtedly saved the day at its most critical juncture. Many acts of individual heroism were performed here, as well as elsewhere, during this hard-fought fight; but there was none more deserving of mention than that of the corporal of the Devons, who crossed an open space swept by a very hell of fire, to fetch

water for wounded officers lying in a sangar. Three times did he go and return, and surely the charity and heroism of his act secured him a special providence, for he went and came unharmed, while others less exposed were falling by dozens. So close and deadly was the fire that out of a stretcher-party of four belonging to the Devons, which tried to cross this space, two were shot dead and one was dangerously wounded.

At last the long, hard-fought day drew to a close. The storm that had been threatening since noon at length came up, and, under cover of it, the Boers made their final effort. At Waggon Hill, along the southern edge of the ridge, and at Cæsar's Camp, they made a fierce and simultaneous rush. Hundreds of Boers, who had been hidden all day among the rocks and stones, leaped out, and, reinforced by huge masses from the dongas and spruits in the valley, they rushed forward in a wild attempt to carry our position. But the British soldiers were ready for them. Amid rain so heavy that men could not see each other a hundred yards away, and with the lightning and thunder flashing and pealing incessantly overhead, the two forces met. Never have I heard a heavier or more continuous rifle-fire. That of the Boer was as fierce and as deadly as our own ; but, behind the leaden messages of death from our rifles was the bayonet. And, better than all, was the dogged, unbending courage of the British soldier, which, as has been

well said, is never so true and steady as at the close of a long, hard-fought, and doubtful day.

It was the supreme and critical moment of the battle. Through the blinding rain and driving mist our soldiers plunged their way in headlong charge. They minded no more the enemy's bullets, no thought of death or danger chilled their courage; the foe was in front, and the fierce blood-lust—that awful, uncontrollable desire for physical contact with his enemy, which now and then comes to a soldier, and makes him the most ferocious being that breathes—filled every man, and panting forward rushed Devonshire men and Manchester men, the grim Scots of the Gordons, and the eager cockneys of the Rifle Corps. The hardy farmers, who had assailed them so bravely all day, saw them coming, and knew they had met their masters. For one brief instant they stood and fired, then for very life they broke and fled, afraid to face the bayonet. The rain, which had been falling with more than tropical violence, began to lighten at the moment, and our soldiers, unable to reach their flying enemy with steel, once more opened fire.

Now the Boer began to pay in earnest the penalty of his temerity in attacking British troops. Across the plain over which they had to retreat, the storm was pouring rivers of water. The dry dongas and watercourses, which earlier in the day had afforded safe shelter, and where they had gathered their dead and wounded, were now roaring torrents. On the

banks of Fourie's Spruit and Intombi Spruit the Boers hesitated, but they had to make a grim choice, and make it quickly. In front was the rushing water, and behind and all around were the flying bullets. Into the streams they plunged, and numbers were washed down into the Klip River and drowned. The dead and wounded men who had been left in the dongas and spruits for safety were also swept away by the floods, and not a few of the fugitives were shot as they struggled out on the opposite banks. It was a complete and absolute rout, so complete that this morning the Boer burial-parties admitted to our men that it was the most disastrous battle they had fought since the beginning of the war. Our losses are, unhappily, by no means light. In officers they were especially severe, no less than forty-four being killed or wounded. One company of the Gordons at the close of the battle was commanded by a lance-corporal, who was the senior officer unwounded.

The Imperial Light Horse was commanded by a junior captain, and could only muster about 100 men fit for duty out of nearly 500. The Devons and Manchesters also suffered heavily, but the saddest loss on our side was Colonel Dick-Cunyngham. He had only recently returned to duty after recovering from the wound he received at Eland's Laagte. Lord Ava's wound is also a fatal one, and he is universally mourned. He was a favourite with every one, and his cheery presence will be

missed by all who knew him, and especially by General Hamilton, on whose staff he served.

Of the general aspect of the battle there is little to say. It was less a battle than a prolonged duel to the death between long lines of desperate, determined men. The enemy, partly by treachery, partly by a brave rush, obtained a position in the hours of darkness. He gained not an inch during the whole dreadful day, and he lost very little until the last charge drove him away headlong. It was a fight in which the mettle of both sides was well tried, and, thank God! that of our own proved to be the best in the end.

At two other points besides Bester's Hill were attacks made by the enemy—a tentative one at Helpmakaar Post, and a more serious attack at Observation Hill, in which the enemy came well up to our lines. In both cases they were easily repulsed, in that against Observation Hill with heavy loss to the Boers. The regiments engaged here were the Leicesters, Liverpools, three companies of the Devons, and three or four of the Rifle Brigade. The latter were very much exposed to artillery fire from Surprise Hill and Thornhill's Kopje. Their sangars were blown flat by the shells, and it speaks admirably for their steadiness that, with practically no cover, they resisted and drove back a very heavy and determined attack. Our total loss in the battle was 121 killed and 242 wounded—a total of 363. It was a heavy loss, but it was the

price we had to pay for keeping Ladysmith out of the hands of the enemy. Very few prisoners were taken. In the early morning some Light Horse troopers were captured, but when the Boers retreated they left the men, some of whom were wounded, behind them. Two officers of the Gordons were also captured. They were taken to the Free State laager, from which, however, they subsequently escaped, at the cost, I am afraid, of much personal discomfort to the militant parson who had mounted guard over them with a rifle. Our troops took half a dozen or so wounded Boers, who are now in hospital; but, so far as is known, not a man of ours remains in the hands of the enemy.

To-day has been spent in the sad work of caring for the wounded and burying the dead. General Joubert, early in the morning, sent in a request to be allowed to send parties to remove his dead. To this Sir George White returned a reply saying that the dead Boers in our lines would be carried down the hill and handed over on the neutral ground on the plain, but that no Boers would be allowed in our positions. The arrangement was subsequently carried out, and 133 were handed over to their friends. This was the number actually killed on top of the hill. It was only a small proportion of the number killed on the slope, in the mimosa bush, and at the spruits during the retreat, all of whom were, of course, removed by the Boers themselves, or were washed away by the floods. Our own dead

were buried, some on the battlefield, and some in the little cemetery at Ladysmith, where, alas! many a freshly-turned mound of earth covers the last resting-place of a brave and gallant soldier.

The honours of the day are shared about equally by all the troops engaged. General Sir George White has already borne tribute to the gallant and timely services of the Devonshire Regiment. Brigadier-General Hamilton pays a similar tribute to the gallant Volunteers of the Imperial Light Horse, whose stubborn courage and cool, steady fighting did so much to save the day at Waggon Hill. Addressing Colonel Edwardes (late of the 5th Dragoon Guards), the commanding officer, General Hamilton says—

"I write this line just to let you and your brave fellows know that in my despatch it will be made quite clear that the Imperial Light Horse were second to none. No one realizes more clearly than I do that they were the backbone of the defence during that long day's fighting. Please make this quite clear to the men. To have been associated with them I shall always feel to be the highest privilege and honour."

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